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(54) **GENERAL, FLEXIBLE, RESILIENT  
TICKETING INTERFACE BETWEEN A  
DEVICE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND  
TICKETING SYSTEMS**

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**30/016** (2013.01)

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G06F 17/30; G06F 17/30371  
See application file for complete search history.

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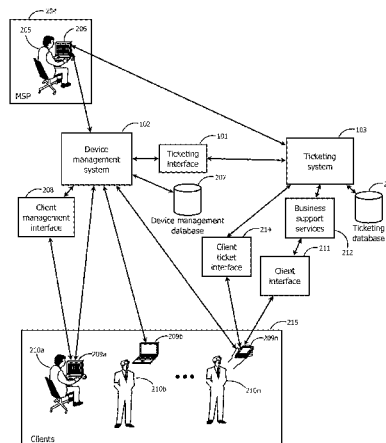
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D. Lanza

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Systems and methods of the present disclosure facilitate synchronizing data between a device management system and ticketing systems. In some embodiments, the system includes an update module, a mapping module, and a service board selection module. The update module may be configured to update ticketing information about a ticketing ticket on the ticketing system to match device management information about a device management ticket on the device management system. The mapping module may be configured to select a ticket category for a device management ticket on the device management system responsive to the device management information about the device management ticket. The service board selection module may be configured to select a service board for a ticketing ticket on the ticketing system.

**12 Claims, 27 Drawing Sheets**



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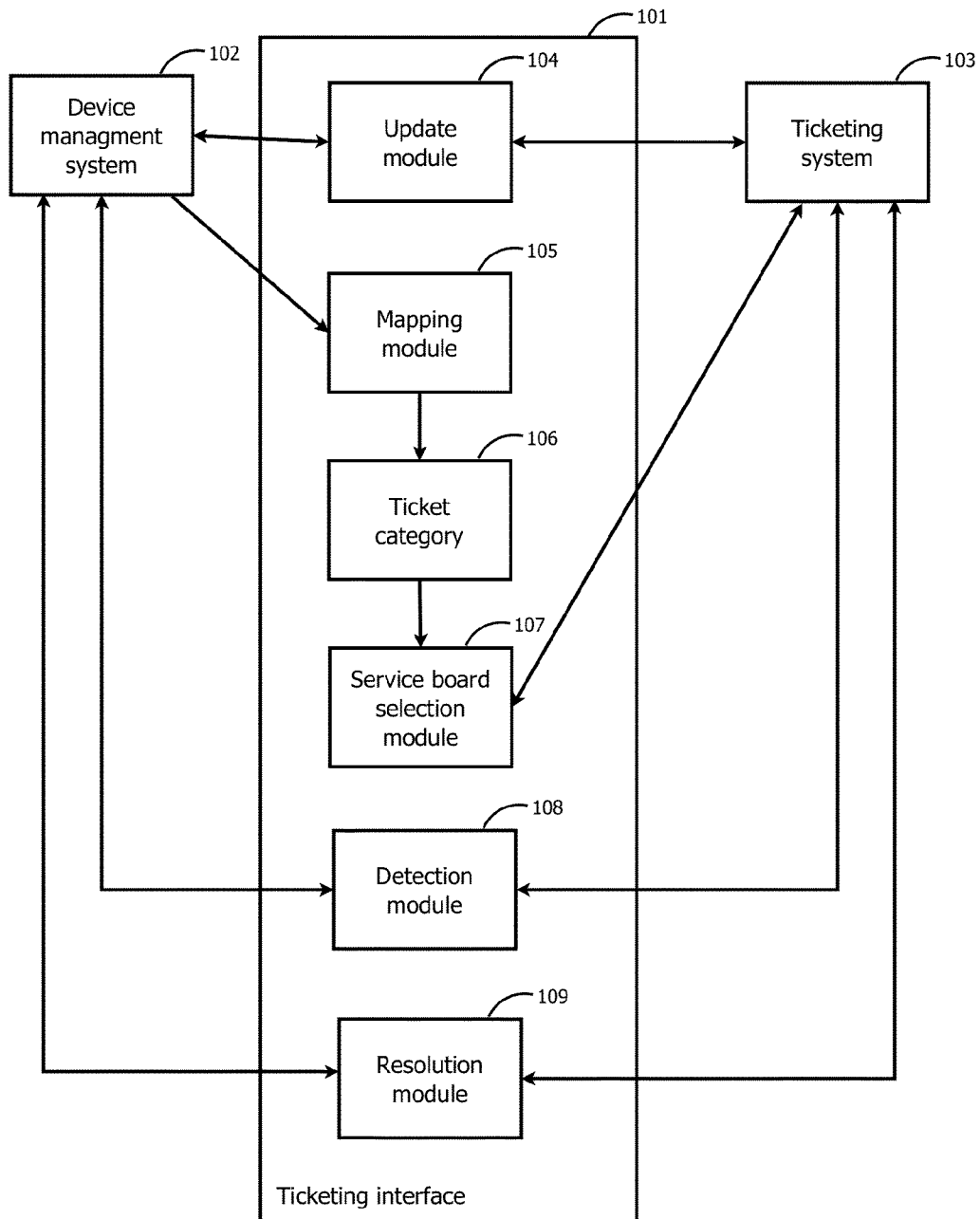


Fig. 1

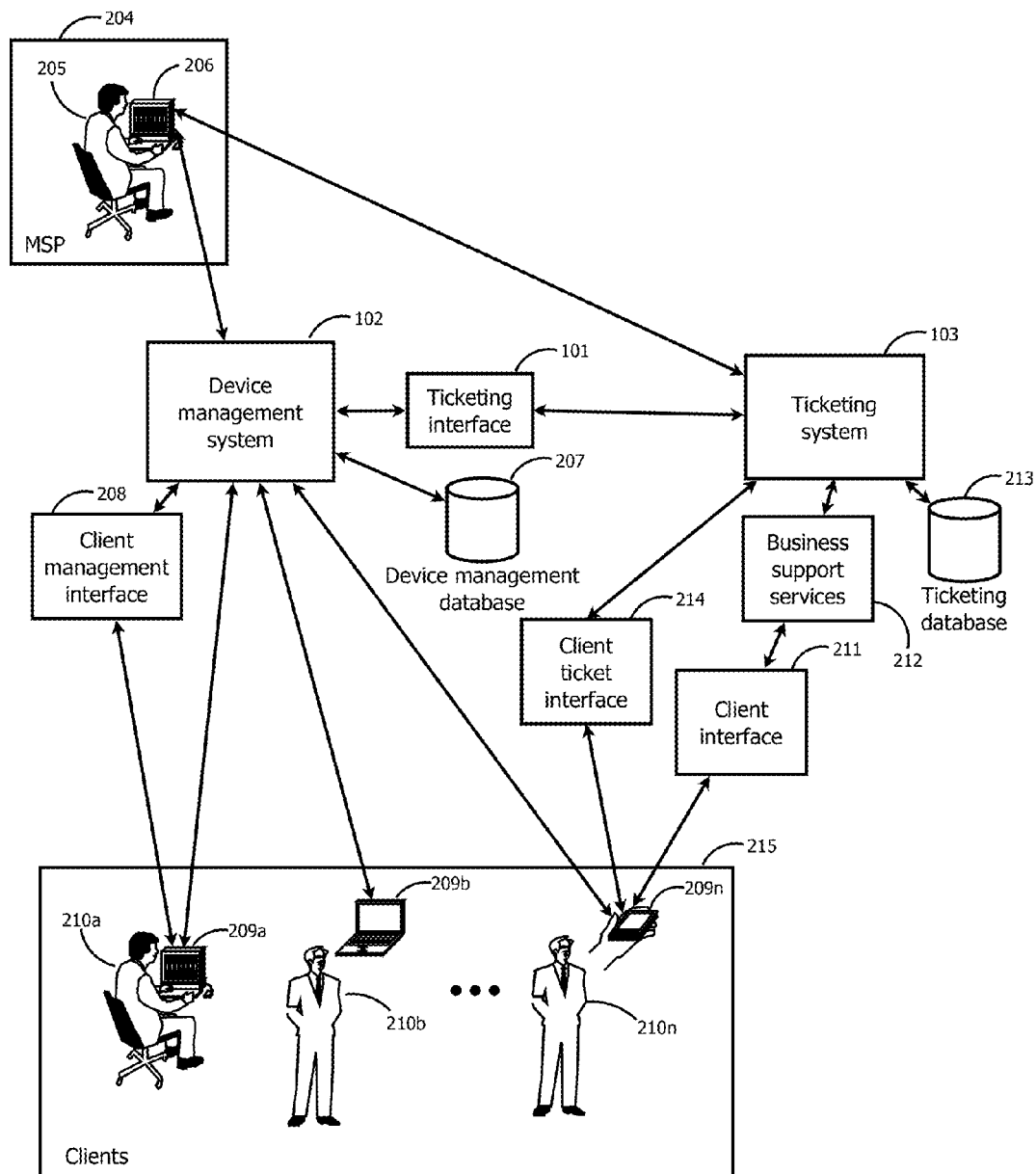


Fig. 2

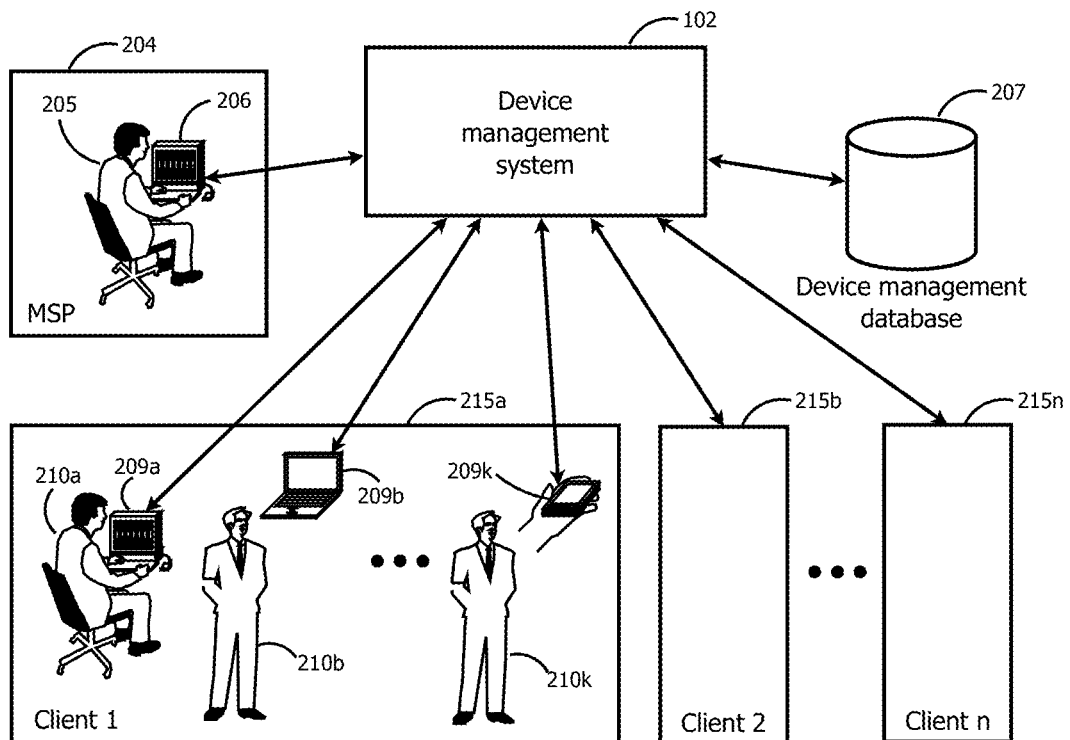


Fig. 3

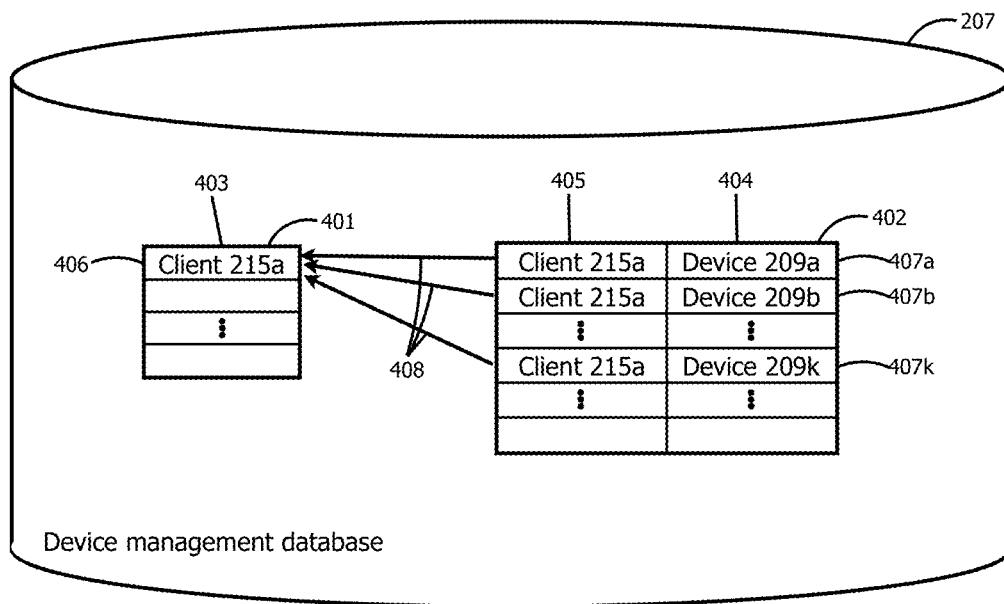


Fig. 4

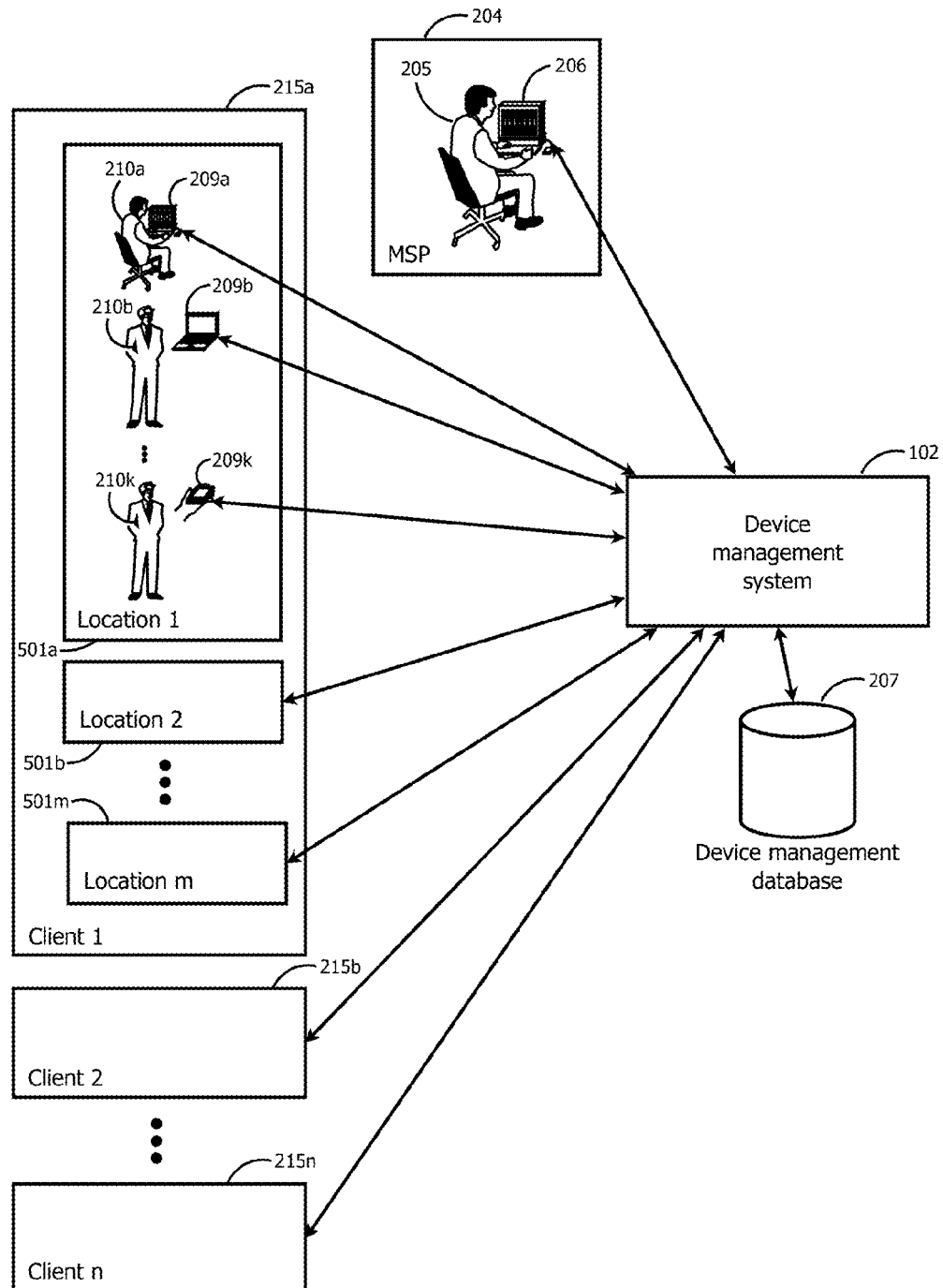


Fig. 5

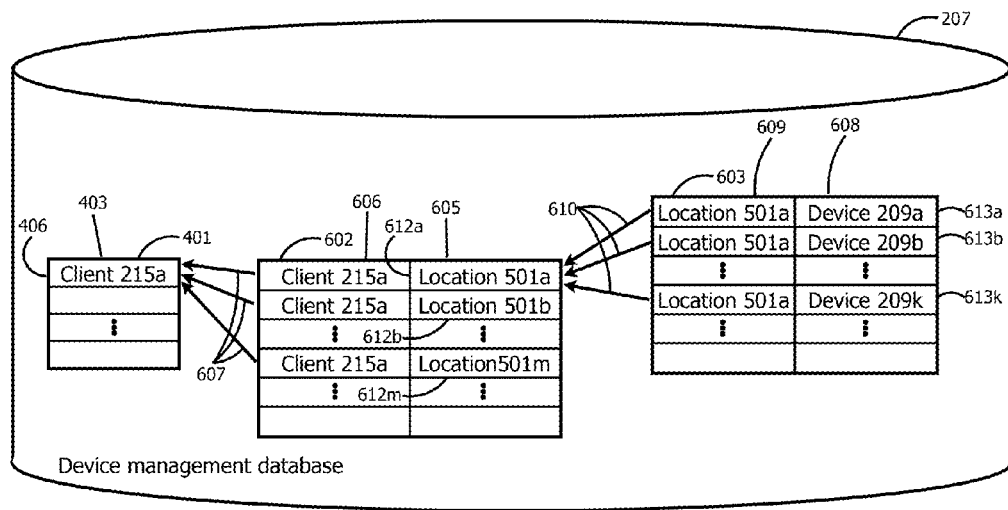


Fig. 6

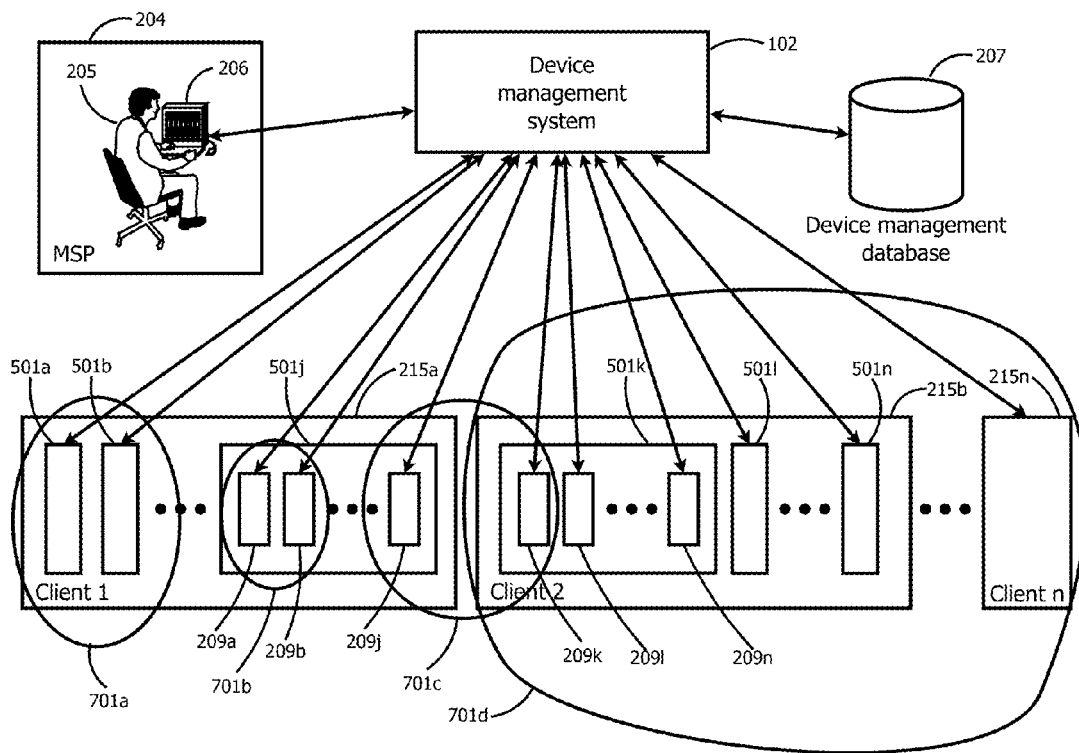


Fig. 7

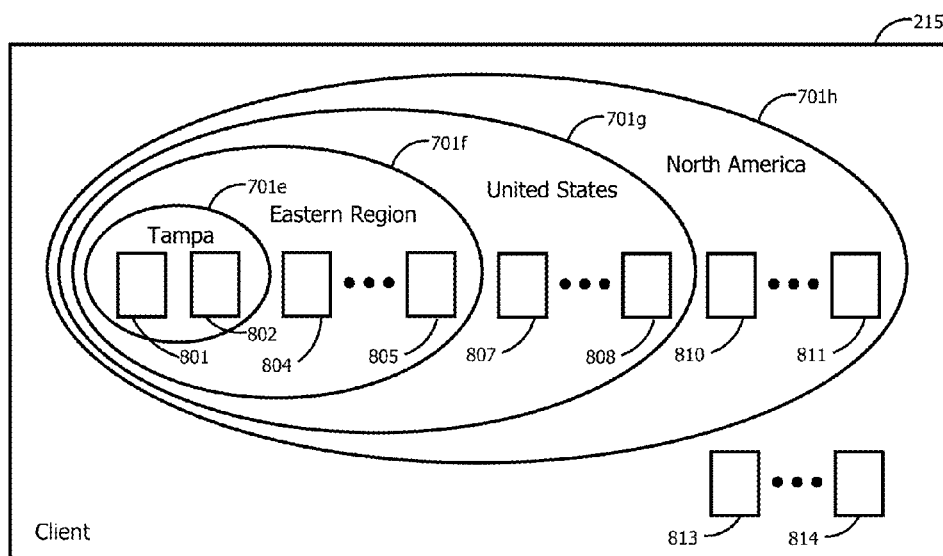


Fig. 8

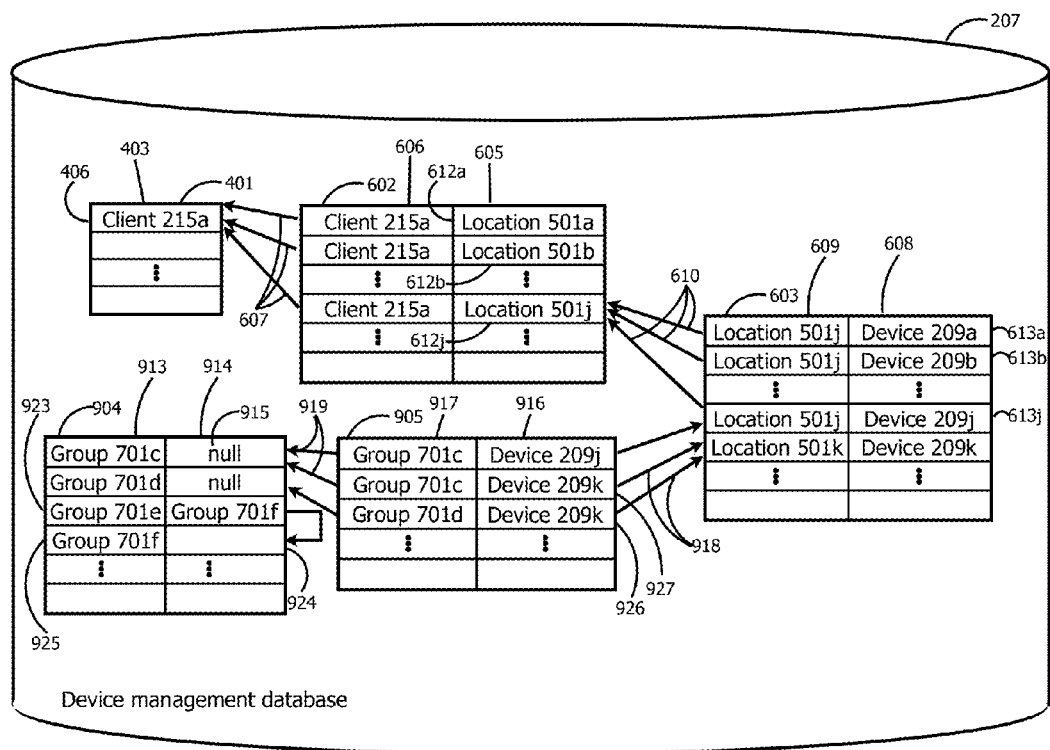


Fig. 9

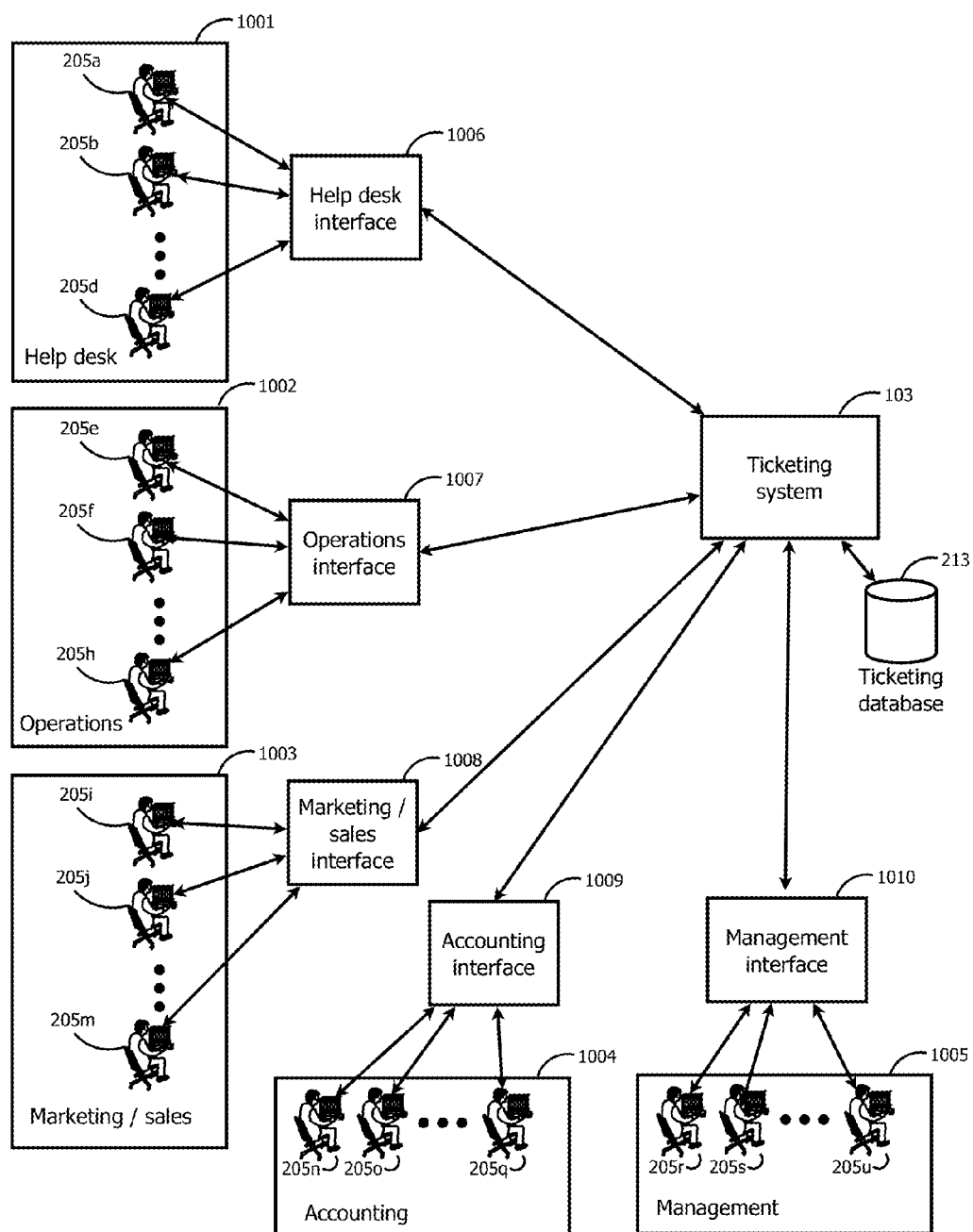


Fig. 10

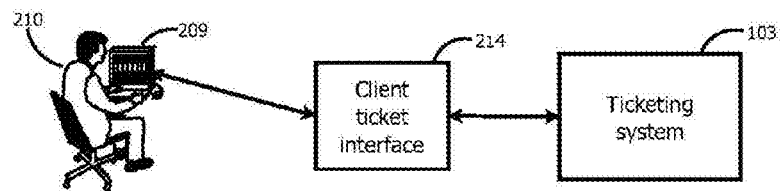


Fig. 11A

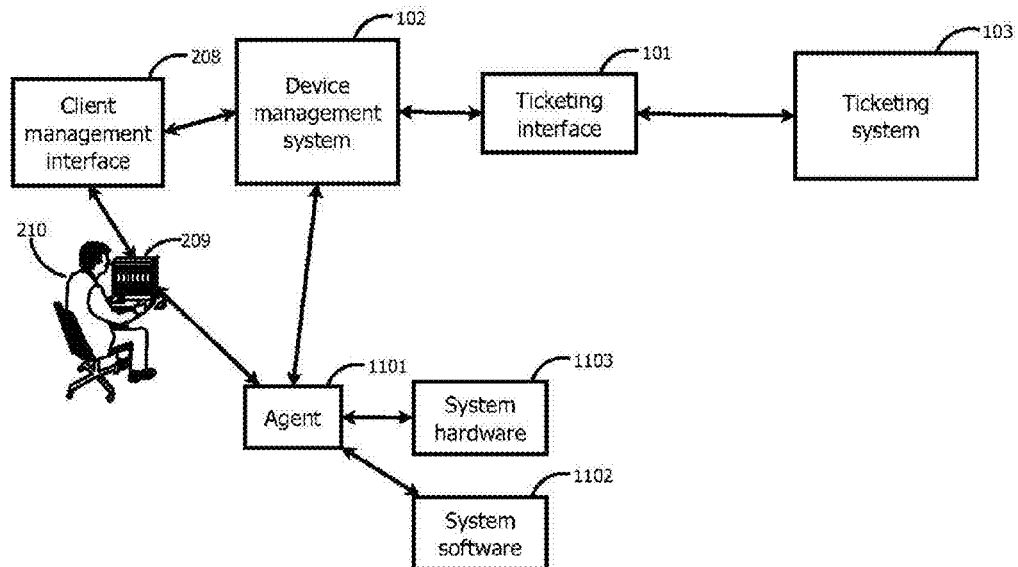


Fig. 11B

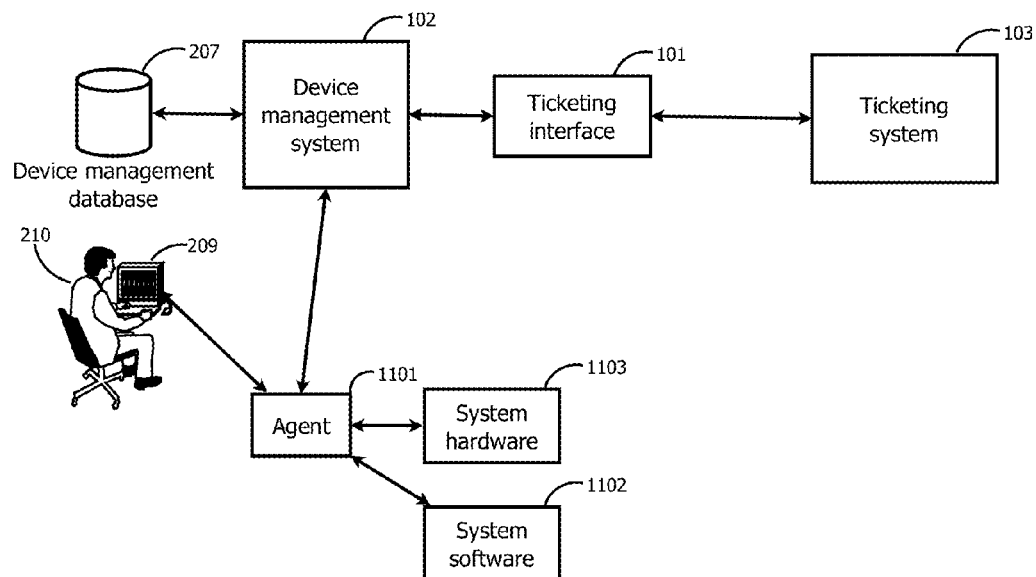


Fig. 12

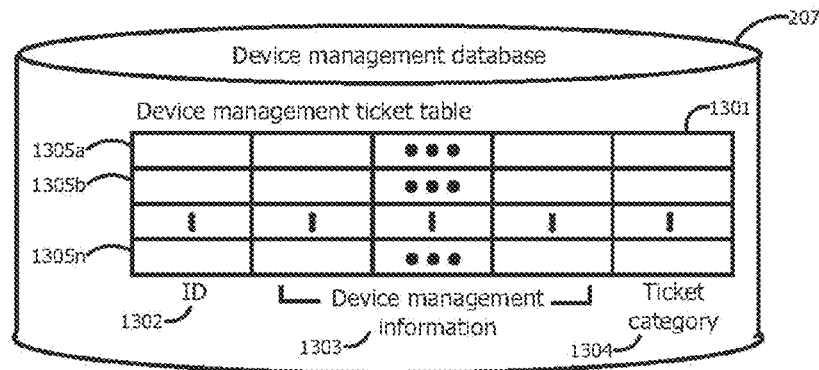


Fig. 13A

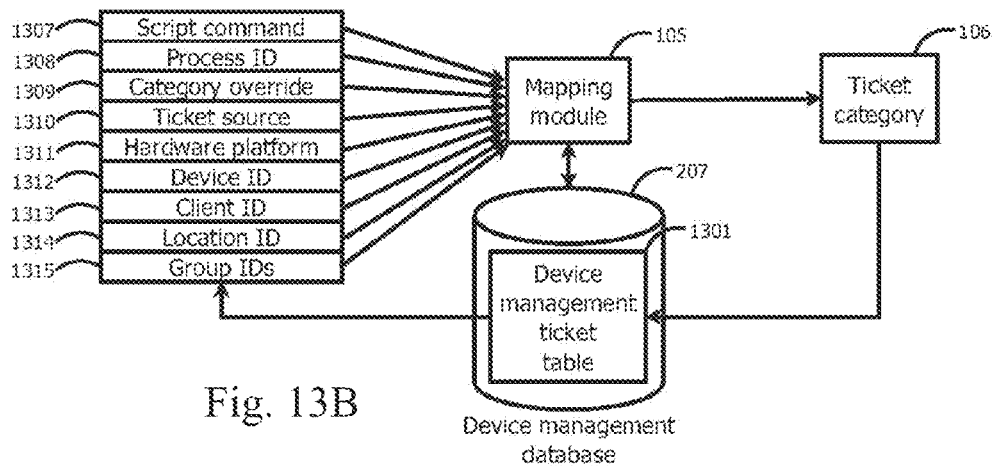


Fig. 13B

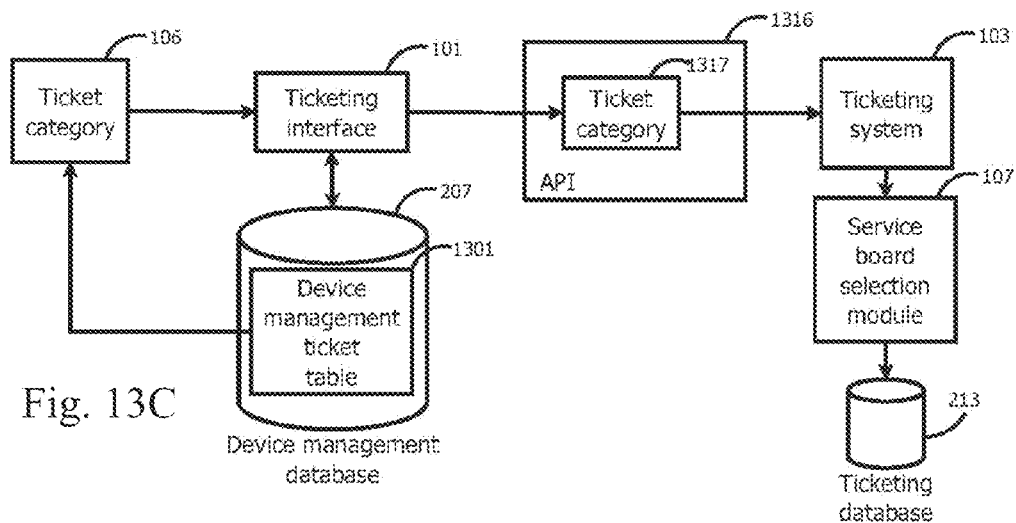


Fig. 13C

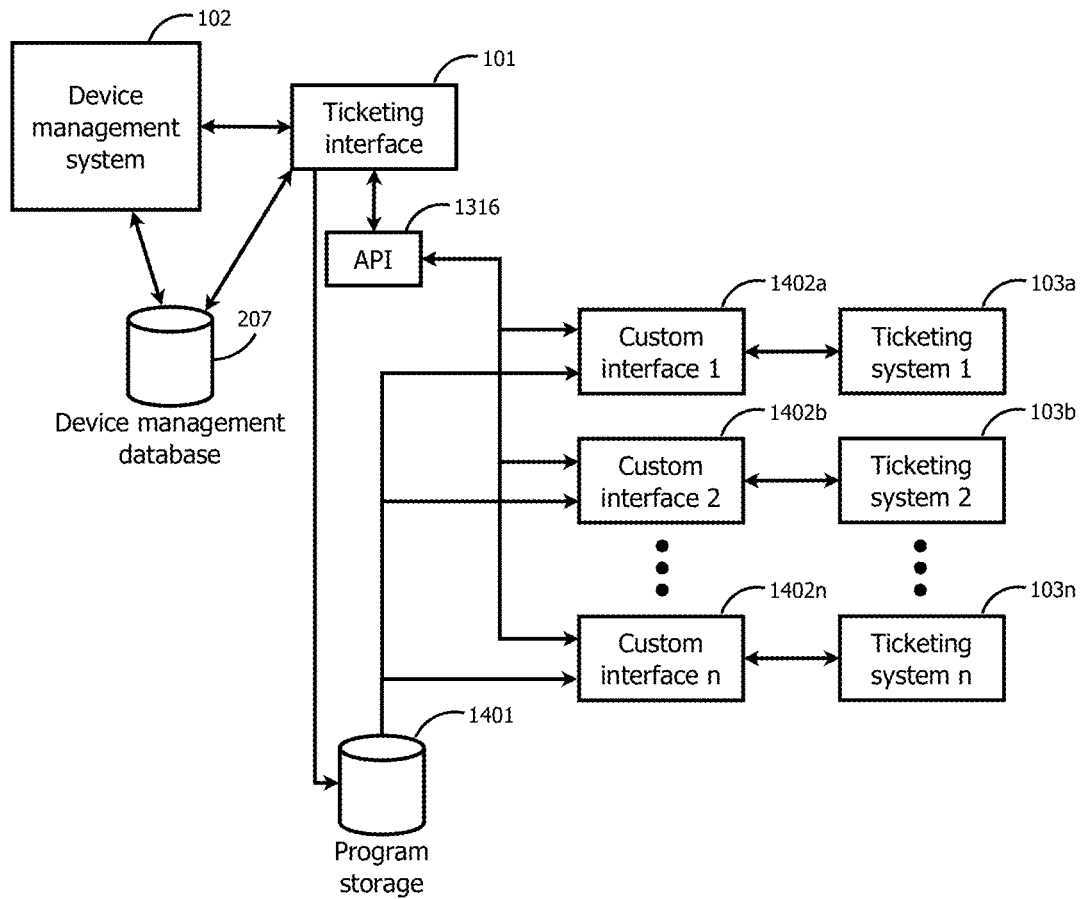


Fig. 14

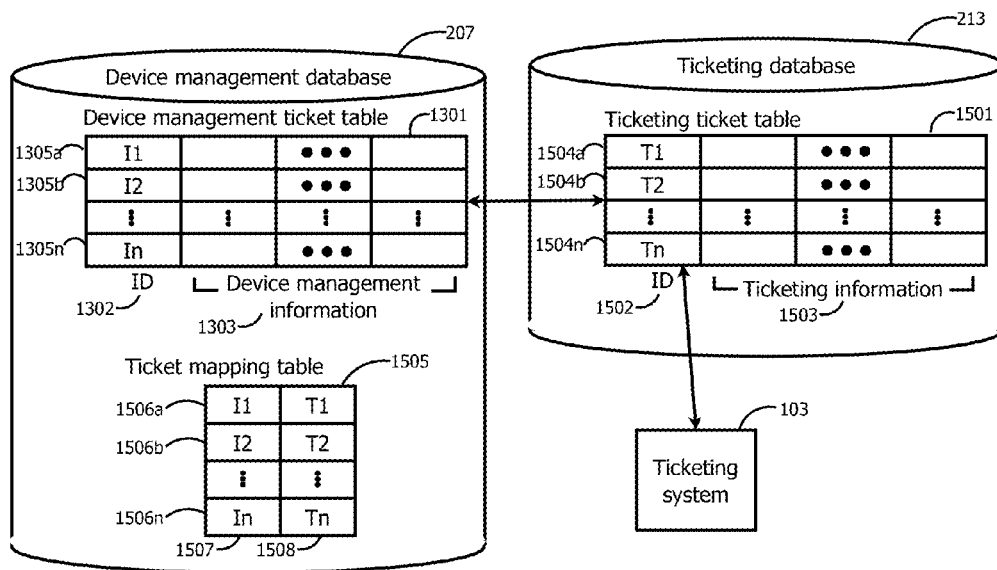


Fig. 15

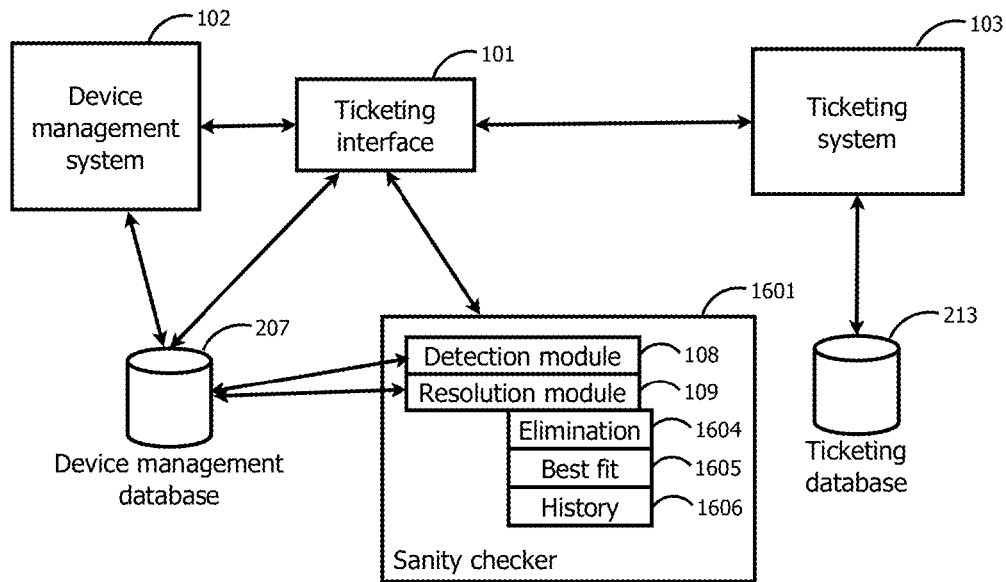


Fig. 16

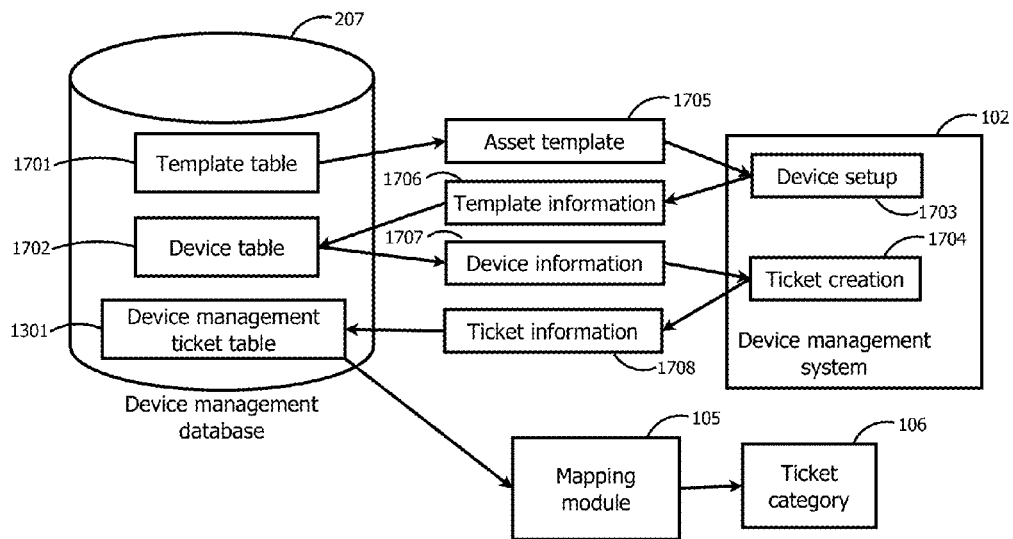


Fig. 17

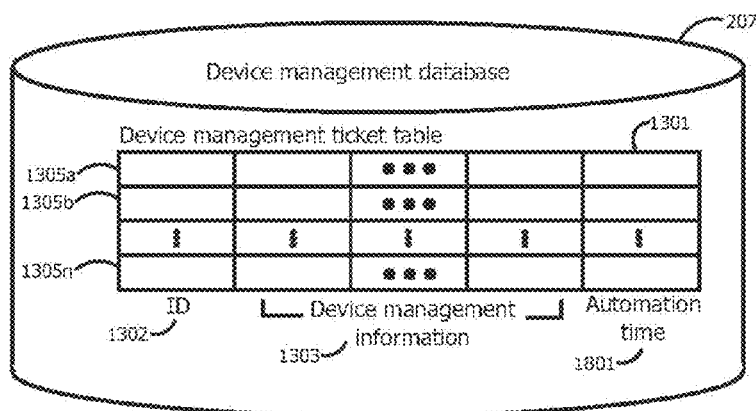


Fig. 18A

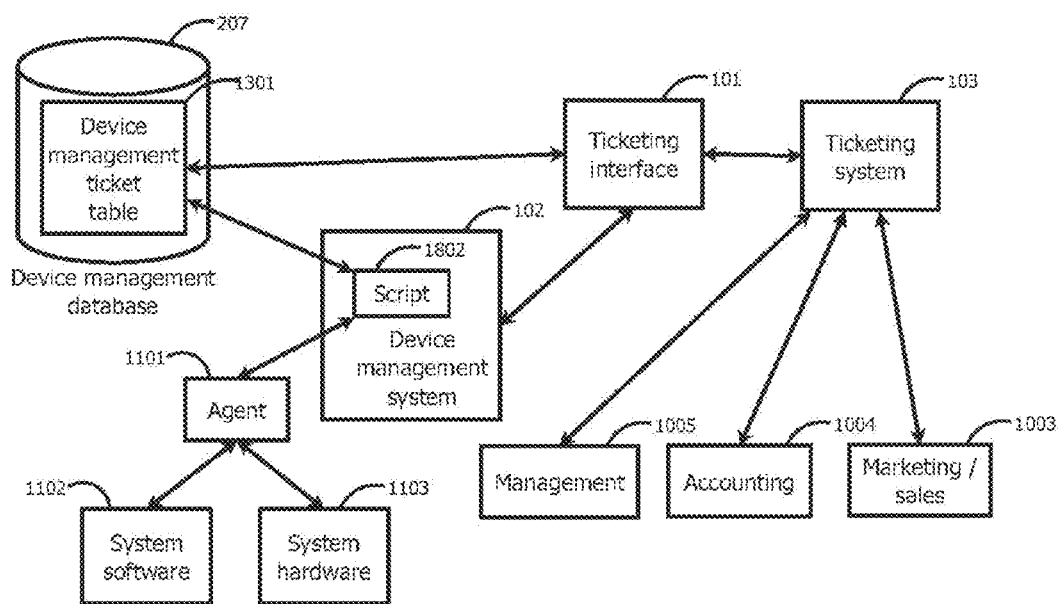


Fig. 18B

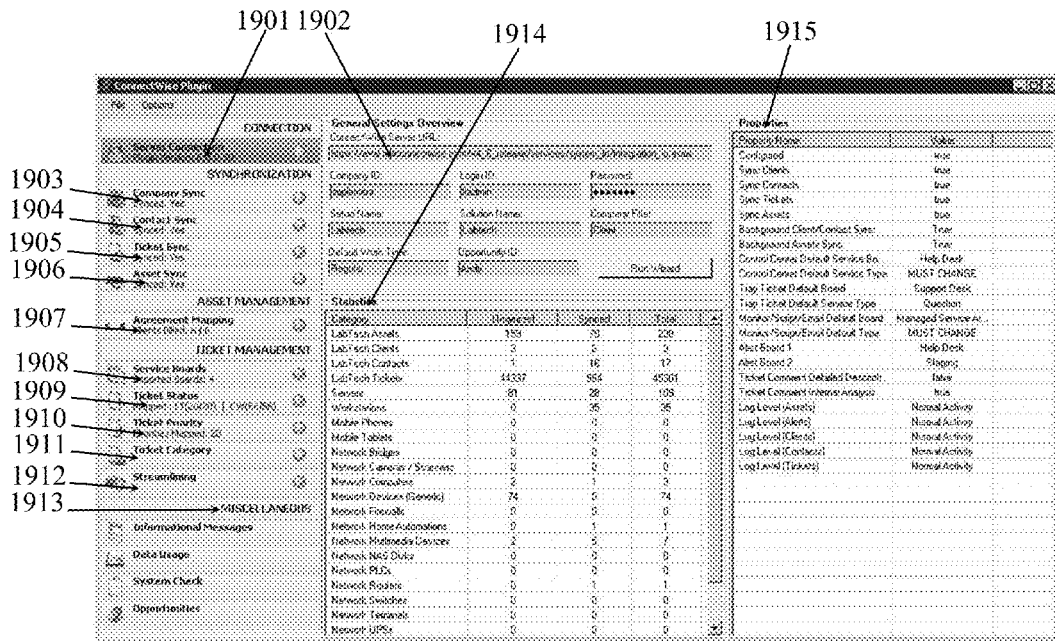


Fig. 19

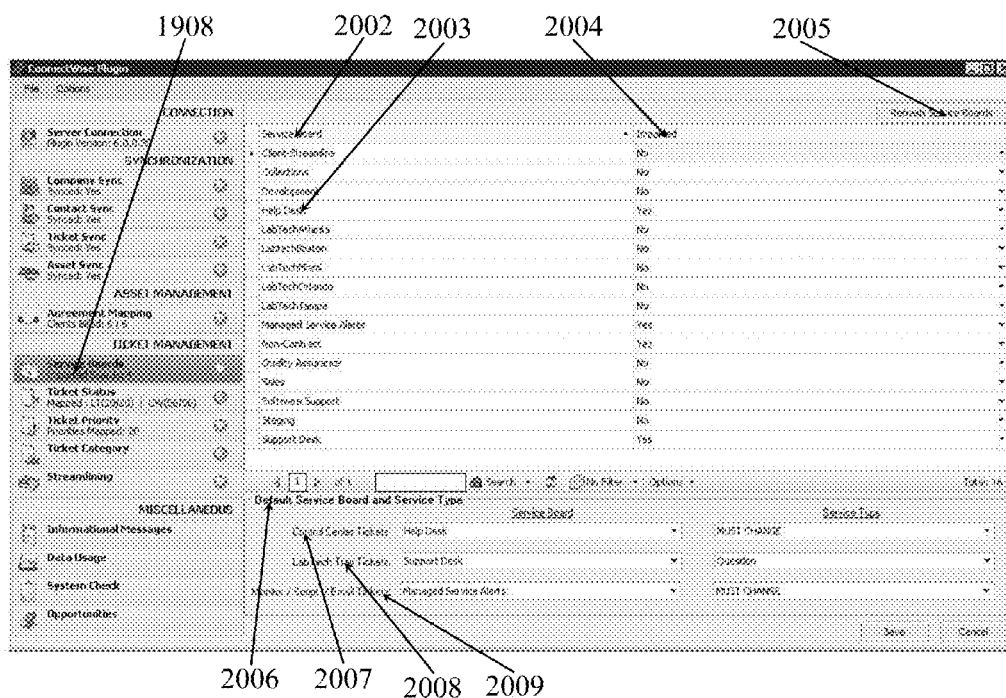


Fig. 20

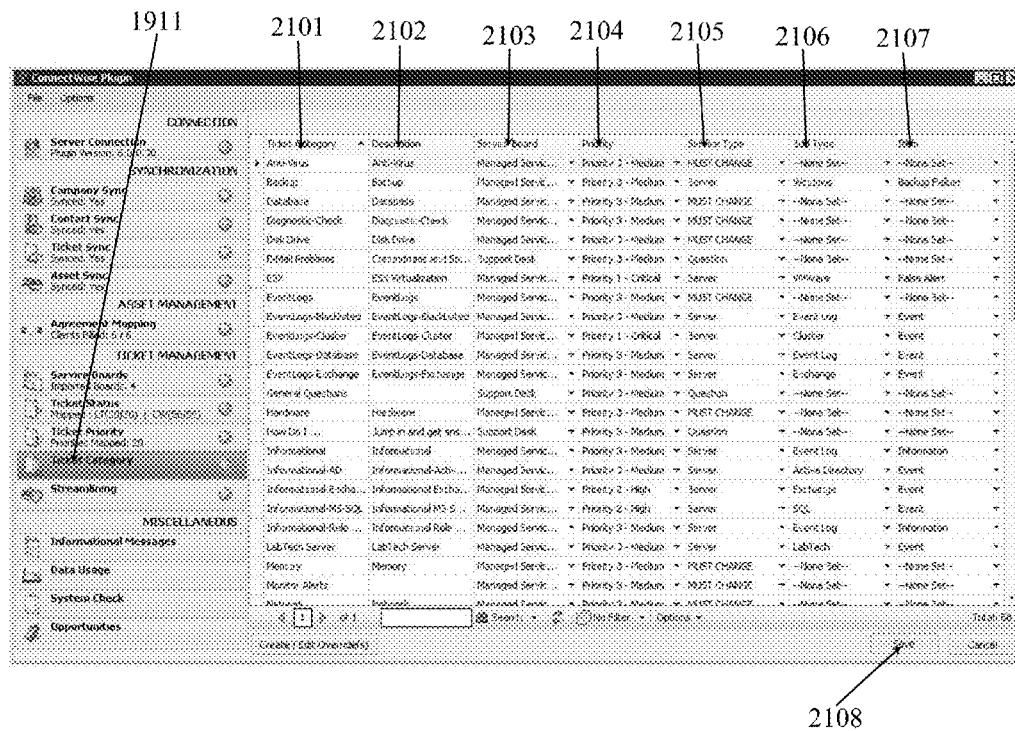


Fig. 21

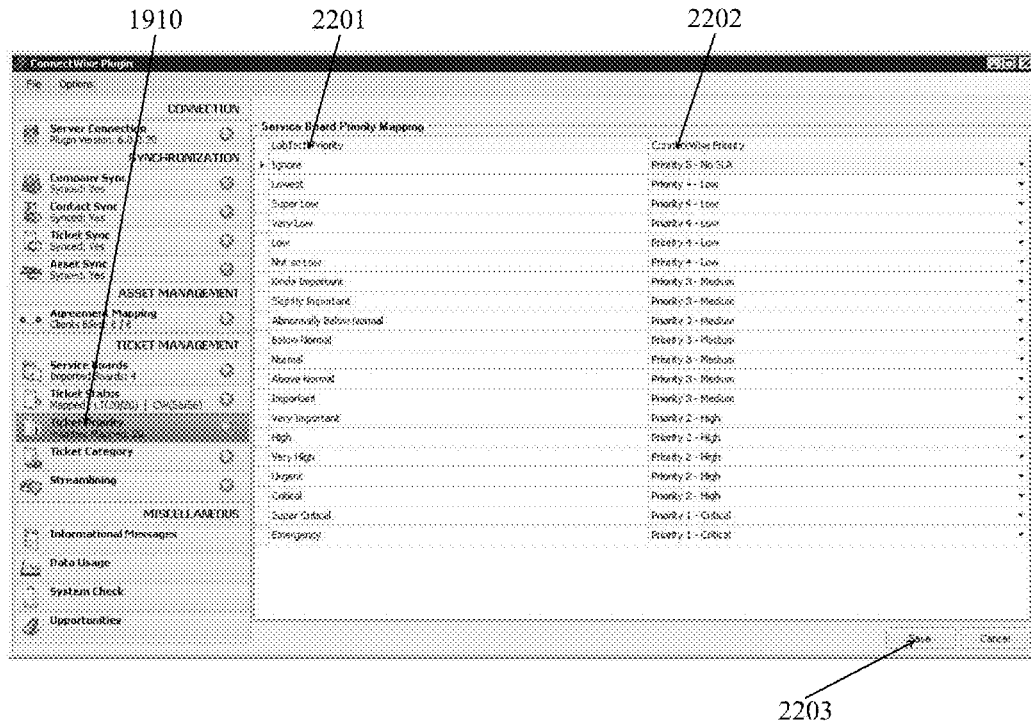


Fig.22

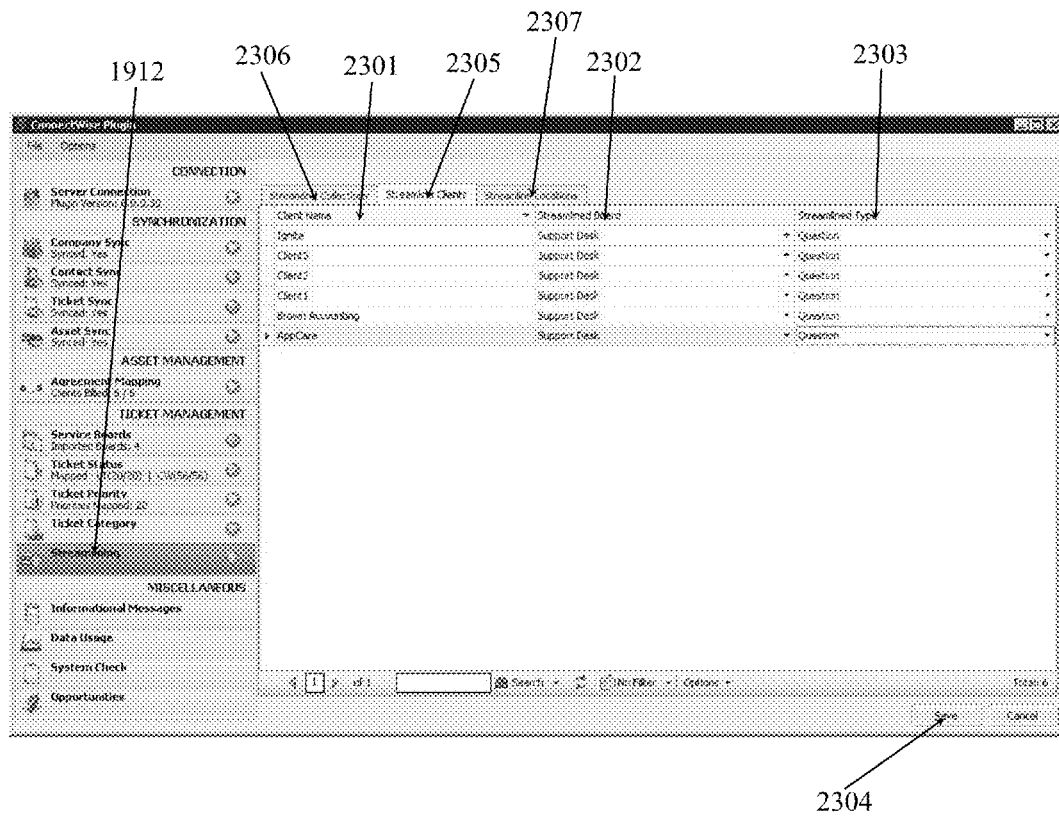
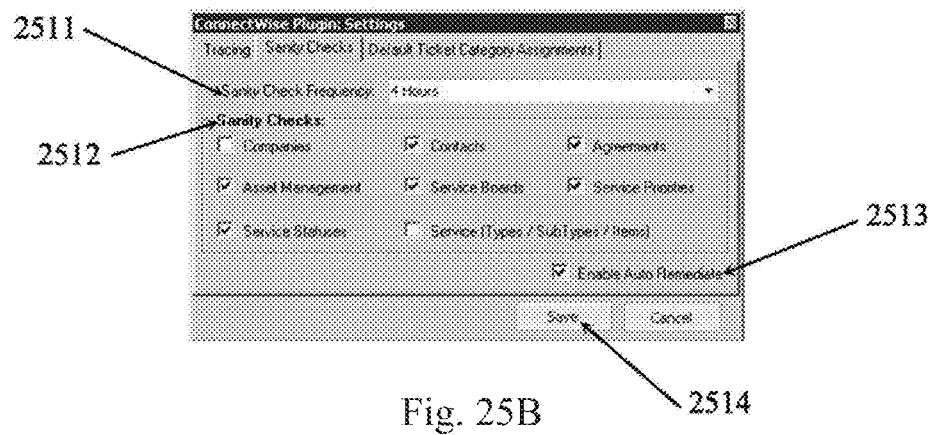
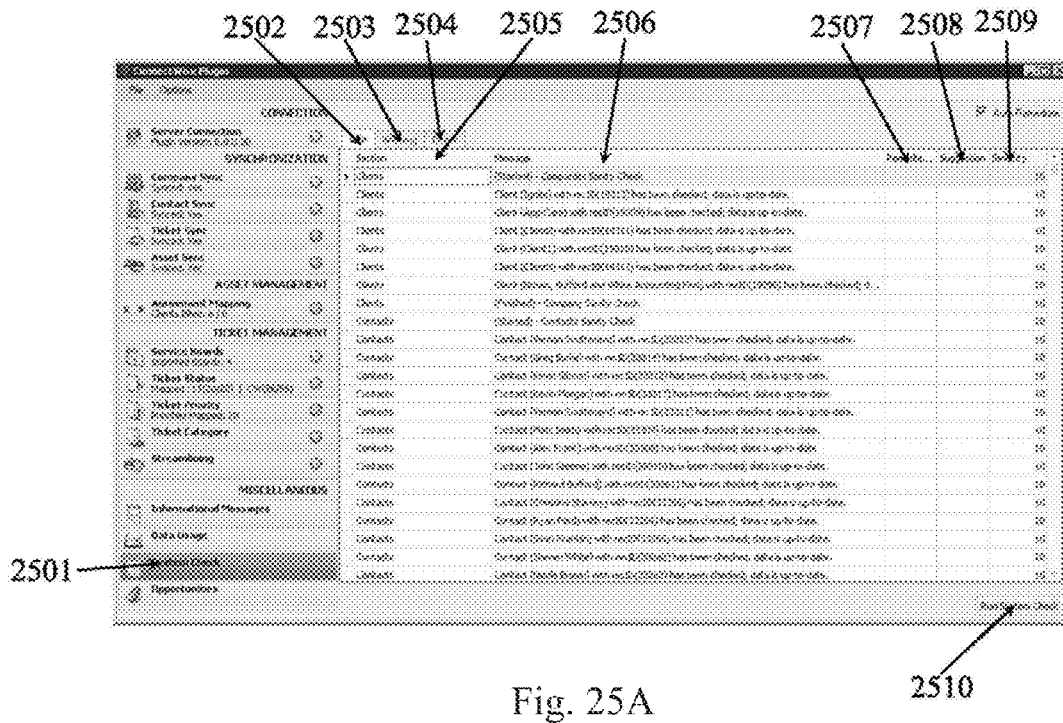


Fig. 23



Fig. 24



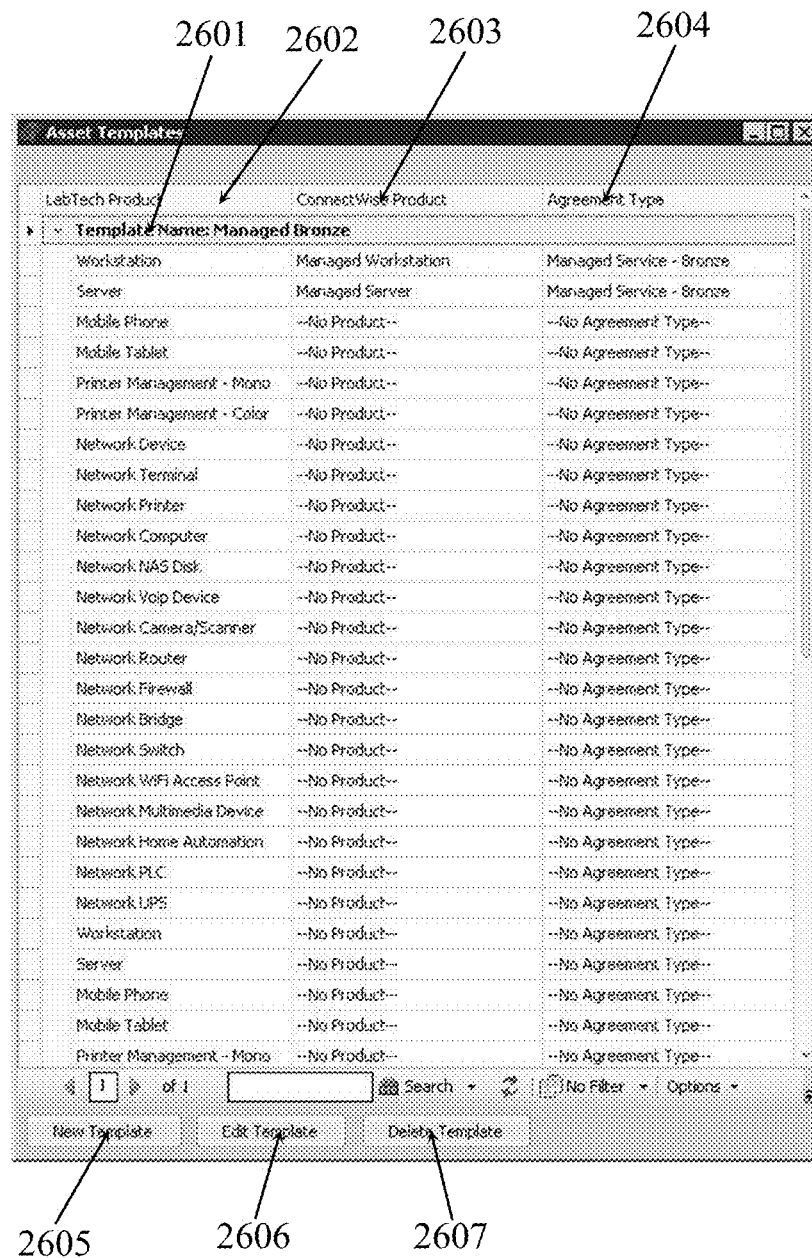


Fig. 26

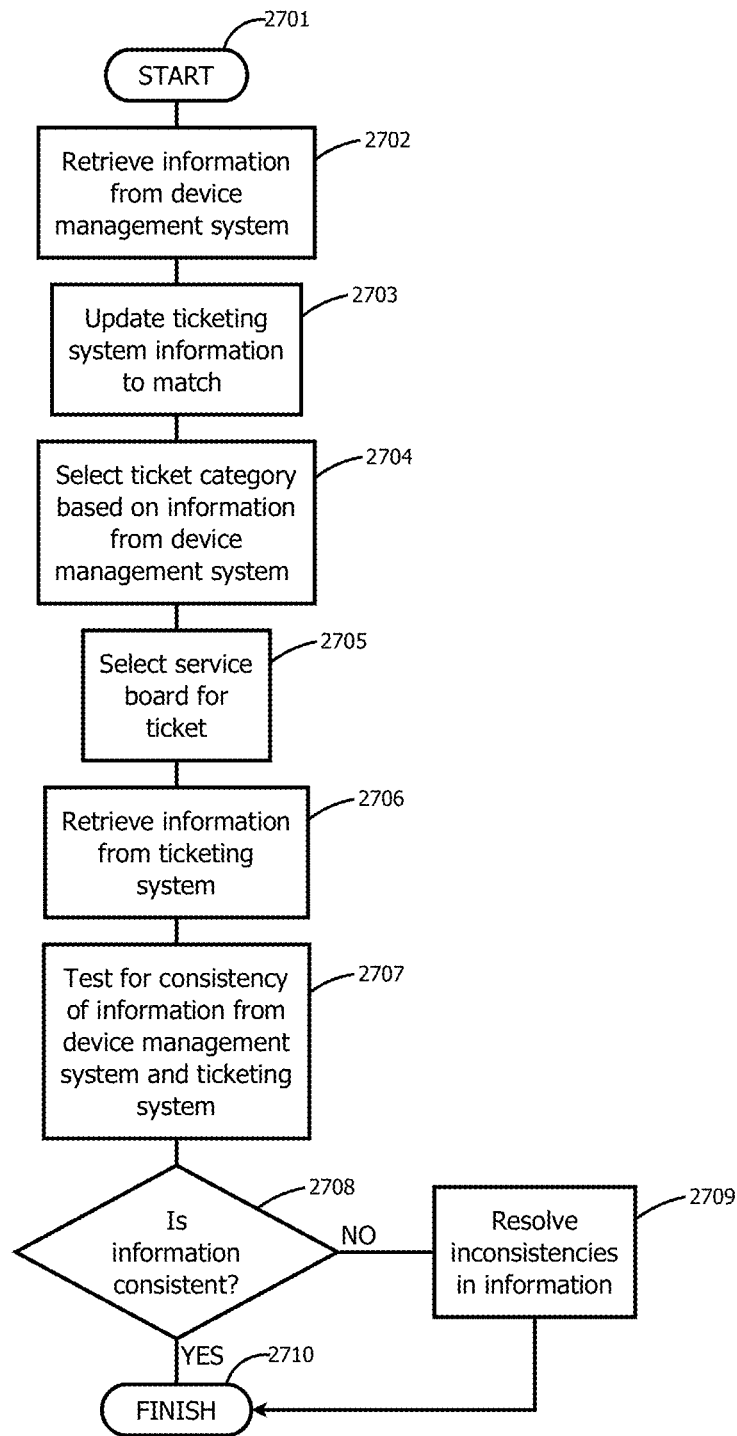


Fig. 27

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# GENERAL, FLEXIBLE, RESILIENT TICKETING INTERFACE BETWEEN A DEVICE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND TICKETING SYSTEMS

## FIELD OF THE DISCLOSURE

The present disclosure generally relates to the use of device management systems to facilitate the management of computing devices. More specifically, the present disclosure relates to the use of ticketing systems with a ticketing interface that improves the process of ticketed device management.

## BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Managed Service Providers (MSPs) use device management systems to automate the management of their client devices. MSPs can also use ticketing systems to manage their own internal processes. There is some overlap between the information generated and used by device management systems and ticketing systems. Existing interfaces duplicate this common information manually, which introduces errors.

## SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Systems and methods of the present disclosure facilitate synchronizing data between a device management system and ticketing systems. For example, the present disclosure provides an automated interface between device management systems and ticketing systems that is configured to bi-directionally transfer information between the systems. The automated interface allows the system to be configured responsive to specific business needs, maintains flexibility so various ticketing systems can be used, and compensates for errors introduced into the overall system by, e.g., differences in various interfacing systems and/or user errors and limitations.

At least one aspect of the present disclosure is directed to a system for synchronizing data between a device management system and a ticketing system. In some embodiments, the system includes an update module, a mapping module, and a service board selection module. The update module can be configured to update ticketing information associated with a first type of ticket, such as a ticketing ticket of the ticketing system. The ticket information can be updated to match device management information associated with a second type of ticket, such as a device management ticket of the device management system. The mapping module can be configured to select a ticket category for a device management ticket on the device management system responsive to the device management information about the device management ticket. The service board selection module may be configured to select a service board for a ticketing ticket on the ticketing system.

In some embodiments, the system includes a detection module. The detection module may be configured to test the device management information for consistency with the ticketing information.

In some embodiments, the system includes a resolution module. The resolution module may be configured to repair issues with the device management information and ticketing information when the test for consistency fails.

At least one aspect of the present disclosure is directed to a method for synchronizing data between a device management system and a ticketing system. The method can include receiving, by an update module executing on at least one processor of a server communicatively coupled to the device

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management system and the ticketing system, ticket information associated with a ticketing ticket from the ticketing system. The method can also include receiving, by the update module from the device management system, device management information associated with a device management ticket. In some embodiments, the method includes comparing, by the update module, the ticketing information with the device management information. Responsive to the comparison, the method can include updating the ticketing information so it substantially matches the device management information. In some embodiments, the method can include identifying, by a mapping module executing on the server, a ticket category of the device management ticket based on the device management information. The method can include selecting, by a service board selection module executing on the server, a service board for the ticketing ticket responsive to the identified ticket category.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is an illustrative block diagram of an embodiment of a ticketing interface.

FIG. 2 is an illustrative block diagram of an embodiment of an interface between a device management system and a ticketing system.

FIG. 3 is an illustrative block diagram of an embodiment of an MSP providing services to multiple clients.

FIG. 4 is an illustrative block diagram of an embodiment of tables in a database.

FIG. 5 is an illustrative block diagram of an embodiment of the organization of devices into locations.

FIG. 6 is an illustrative block diagram of an embodiment of tables in a database.

FIG. 7 is an illustrative block diagram of an embodiment of the use of groups.

FIG. 8 is an illustrative block diagram of an embodiment of hierarchies of groups.

FIG. 9 is an illustrative block diagram of an embodiment of tables in a database.

FIG. 10 is an illustrative block diagram of an embodiment of the use of a ticketing system within an MSP.

FIGS. 11A-B are illustrative block diagrams of embodiments of a manual client submission of a ticket.

FIG. 12 is an illustrative block diagram of an embodiment of an automated ticket submission by a client device.

FIGS. 13A-C are illustrative block diagrams of embodiments of ticket categories.

FIG. 14 is an illustrative block diagram of an embodiment of a plug-in architecture for a ticketing interface.

FIG. 15 is an illustrative block diagram of an embodiment of a source of synchronization issues between a management system and a ticketing system.

FIG. 16 is an illustrative block diagram of an embodiment of a sanity checker.

FIG. 17 is an illustrative block diagram of an embodiment of asset templates.

FIGS. 18A-B are illustrative block diagrams of embodiments of automation time records.

FIG. 19 is an illustrative example of an embodiment of a user interface for an overall view of a ticketing interface.

FIG. 20 is an illustrative example of an embodiment of a user interface for display and modification of service boards.

FIG. 21 is an illustrative example of an embodiment of a user interface for display and modification of ticket categories.

FIG. 22 is an illustrative example of an embodiment of a user interface for display and modification of ticket priorities.

FIG. 23 is an illustrative example of an embodiment of a user interface for display and modification of ticket streamlining.

FIG. 24 is an illustrative example of an embodiment of a user interface for display and modification of plug-ins.

FIGS. 25A-B are illustrative examples of embodiments of a user interface for display and modification of a sanity checker.

FIG. 26 is an illustrative example of an embodiment of a user interface for display and modification of asset templates.

FIG. 27 is an illustrative flowchart depicting one embodiment of the steps taken to synchronize a device management system with a ticketing system

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Systems and methods of the present disclosure facilitate synchronizing data between a device management system and ticketing systems. For example, the device management system stores control and status information about the devices under management and the clients, which can be entered and/or modified by a user via a client management interface. An MSP can use a ticketing system to manage and respond to information relevant to managed devices and their end users. This information can be in the form of a ticket and include information about an issue or task that needs to be addressed by the MSP. An end user can directly enter a ticket into the ticketing system, or modify an existing ticket, by using a device to access a client ticket interface.

Since information stored in the device management system and the ticketing system can vary, fall out of synchronization, and/or be in different formats, the ticketing interface can synchronize relevant information between the device management database and the ticketing database. For example, the ticketing interface allows for information that is collected by the device management system to appear in the ticketing system, and information that is collected by the ticketing system to appear in the device management database.

Furthermore, by managing and synchronizing this information among various systems, systems and methods of the present disclosure can utilize the information to provide additional business support services. For example, an MSP can obtain, via the ticketing interface, information related to call times and response times, accuracy of estimates by operations, effectiveness of individual employees, or financial status of the business.

FIG. 1 illustrates a block diagram of a ticketing interface 101. In brief overview, the ticketing interface synchronizes data between a device management system 102 and a ticketing system 103. The system associated with the ticketing interface can include an update module 104 that provides updates to both the device management system 101 and the ticketing system 103 to achieve this synchronization. The system can include a mapping module 105 that generates a ticket category 106 from device management information on the device management system 102. The system can include a service board selection module 107 that uses the ticket category 106 to select a service board for the ticketing ticket in order to facilitate management of the ticket on the ticketing system 103. The system can include a detection module 108 that periodically runs consistency tests on the device management system 102 and the ticketing system 103. In some embodiments, the system can include a resolution module 109, which the detection module 108 can invoke upon finding an inconsistency. The resolution module 109 can correct the problem due to the inconsistency by updating the device management system 102 and the ticketing system 103.

Still referring to FIG. 1, and in further detail, the update module 104 can receive ticketing information associated with a ticketing ticket. The update module 104 can receive the ticketing information via the ticketing interface 101 or network. In some embodiments, the ticketing system 103 provides the ticket or ticketing information to the update module 104, and in some embodiments the update module 104 obtains the ticket from the ticketing system 103. In some embodiments, the update module 104 can obtain, receive or request the ticket information responsive to a condition, event, or user indication. For example, the update module 104 can receive the ticket responsive to an end user submitting a ticket. In another example, the update module 104 can receive a ticket in response to an end user modifying a ticket. In yet another example, the update module 104 can receive the ticket in response to the system identifying a discrepancy, event, or condition occurring with respect to a device management ticket or managed device.

In some embodiments, the update module 104 receives device management information associated with a device management ticket from a device management system 102 via the ticketing interface 101 or the network. In some embodiments, the device management system 102 provides the device management ticket or device management information to the update module 104, and in some embodiments the update module 104 obtains the device management ticket or device management information from the device management system 102. In some embodiments, the update module 104 can obtain, receive or request the device management information responsive to a condition, event, or user indication. For example, the update module 104 can receive the device management information responsive to an end user submitting a ticket. In another example, the update module 104 can receive a device management ticket in response to an end user modifying at least one of a ticketing ticket and a device management ticket. In yet another example, the update module 104 can receive the device management information in response to the system identifying a discrepancy, event, or condition occurring with respect to a ticketing ticket or managed device.

In some embodiments, the update module 104 can compare the ticketing information received from the ticketing system with the device management information received from the device management system. For example, the update module 104 can parse the ticketing information and the device management information to identify the differences or similarities. In some embodiments, the update module 104 compares a field of the ticketing ticket with the corresponding field of the device management ticket to determine whether the values of the field are the same or different. For example, the update module 104 can compare strings of the fields, binary values, numerical values, etc.

In some embodiments, the update module 104 identifies that the ticketing ticket and the device management ticket include the same fields, and then compares the values of the fields. If the update module 104 determines, based on the comparison, that the values of the fields are different, the update module 104 may update one of the ticketing information and the device management information. For example, the update module 104 may identify a timestamp associated with each of the ticketing information and device management information, or a specific field thereof, and identify the most current information. Upon identifying the most current information, the update module 104 can retrieve the current information and use it to update the ticketing information or the device management information, whichever is older.

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In other embodiments, the update module **104** may use other criteria to determine which information should be used to update the ticketing or device management information. For example, the update module **104** may identify which information has been validated by the system, end user, or MSP device. In other embodiments, the update module **104** may always update the ticketing ticket information with the device management ticket information, or vice versa. In some embodiments, a user of the system or MSP may configure an aspect of the update module **104**.

Upon identifying the information that needs to be updated and the information that should be used to perform the update, the update module can perform the update so at least the updated field substantially matches.

In some embodiments, the system includes a mapping module that can analyze or parse the device management information, before being updated or after being updated, to identify a ticket category (e.g., Anti-Virus, Backup, Database, Diagnostic-Check, Disk Drive, E-mail problems, EventLogs, General Questions, Hardware, How Do I, etc.) of the device management ticket, which is discussed further with respect to FIG. **13b**.

In some embodiments, the system includes a service board selection module configured to select a service board (e.g., Managed Services, Support Desk, etc.) for the ticketing ticket in response to the identified ticket category.

FIG. **2** illustrates a block diagram of the components used by an MSP **204** to manage a set of devices **209**. An employee **205** at the MSP **204** uses a device **206** to access a user interface on a device management system **102** and a user interface on a ticketing system **103**. The device management system **102** is connected through a network to the devices under management **209** of the clients **215**, which can be used by end users **210**. The device management system **102** uses a device management database **207** to store control and status information about the devices under management **209** and the clients **215**. Some of the information about the devices under management **209** and the clients **215** is stored in the device management database **207** as device management tickets. An end user, exemplified in FIG. **2** by user **210a**, can add or modify device management ticket information on the device management system **102** by using a device, exemplified in FIG. **2** by device **209a**, to access a client management interface **208**. The client management interface **208** can add or modify device management ticket information that is stored in the device management database **207** on the device management system **102**.

The network can include a local-area network (LAN), such as a company Intranet, a metropolitan area network (MAN), or a wide area network (WAN), such as the Internet or the World Wide Web. In some embodiments, there are multiple networks between the devices and the servers. In one of these embodiments, the network may be a public network, a private network, or may include combinations of public and private networks.

The network may be any type or form of network and may include any of the following: a point-to-point network, a broadcast network, a wide area network, a local area network, a telecommunications network, a data communication network, a computer network, an ATM (Asynchronous Transfer Mode) network, a SONET (Synchronous Optical Network) network, a SDH (Synchronous Digital Hierarchy) network, a wireless network and a wireline network. In some embodiments, the network may include a wireless link, such as an infrared channel or satellite band. The topology of the network may include a bus, star, or ring network topology. The network may include mobile telephone networks utilizing

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any protocol or protocols used to communicate among mobile devices, including advanced mobile phone protocol ("AMPS"), time division multiple access ("TDMA"), code-division multiple access ("CDMA"), global system for mobile communication ("GSM"), general packet radio services ("GPRS") or universal mobile telecommunications system ("UMTS"). In some embodiments, different types of data may be transmitted via different protocols. In other embodiments, the same types of data may be transmitted via different protocols.

The device management system **102**, ticketing system **103**, devices **206**, and devices under management **209** can include at least one logic device such as a computing device having a processor to communicate via the network, for example with client device **209** or MSP device **206**. The systems **102** and **103** can include at least one server. For example, the device management system **102** and ticketing system **103** can include a plurality of servers located in at least one data center. In some embodiments, the ticketing system **102**, device management system **103**, or ticketing interface **101** can include or communicate with at least one of the update module **104**, mapping module **105**, service board selection module **107**, detection module **108**, and resolution module **109**. The update module **104**, mapping module **105**, service board selection module **107**, detection module **108**, and resolution module **109** can each include at least one processing unit or other logic device such as a programmable logic array engine. The update module **104**, mapping module **105**, service board selection module **107**, detection module **108**, and resolution module **109** can be separate components, a single component, part of the device management system **102**, part of the ticketing system **103**, or an independent entity.

The one or more servers associated with the device management system **102**, ticketing system **103**, ticketing interface, or MSP device **206** do not need to be physically proximate to each other or in the same machine farm. Thus, the servers logically grouped as a machine farm may be interconnected using a wide-area network (WAN) connection or a metropolitan-area network (MAN) connection. For example, a machine farm may include servers physically located in different continents or different regions of a continent, country, state, city, campus, or room. Data transmission speeds between servers in the machine farm can be increased if the servers are connected using a local-area network (LAN) connection or some form of direct connection.

Management of the servers may be de-centralized. For example, one or more servers may comprise components, subsystems and circuits to support one or more management services. In one of these embodiments, one or more servers provide functionality for management of dynamic data, including techniques for handling failover, data replication, and increasing robustness. Each server may communicate with a persistent store and, in some embodiments, with a dynamic store.

A server may include a file server, application server, web server, proxy server, appliance, network appliance, gateway, gateway server, virtualization server, deployment server, secure sockets layer virtual private network ("SSL VPN") server, or firewall. In one embodiment, the server may be referred to as a remote machine or a node.

The system and its components, such as a device management system **102**, ticketing system **103** and modules **104**, **105**, **107**, **108** and **109**, may include hardware elements, such as one or more processors, logic devices, or circuits. For example, the system and its components may include a bus or other communication component for communicating information and a processor or processing circuit coupled to the

bus for processing information. The hardware elements can also include one or more processors or processing circuits coupled to the bus for processing information. The system also includes main memory, such as a random access memory (RAM) or other dynamic storage device, coupled to the bus for storing information, and instructions to be executed by the processor. Main memory can also be used for storing position information, temporary variables, or other intermediate information during execution of instructions by the processor. The system may further include a read only memory (ROM) or other static storage device coupled to the bus for storing static information and instructions for the processor. A storage device, such as a solid state device, magnetic disk or optical disk, can be coupled to the bus for persistently storing information and instructions.

According to various embodiments, the processes described herein can be implemented by the system or hardware components in response to the one or more processors executing an arrangement of instructions contained in memory. Such instructions can be read into memory from another computer-readable medium, such as a storage device. Execution of the arrangement of instructions contained in memory causes the system to perform the illustrative processes described herein. One or more processors in a multiprocessing arrangement may also be employed to execute the instructions contained in memory. In alternative embodiments, hard-wired circuitry may be used in place of or in combination with software instructions to effect illustrative embodiments. Thus, embodiments are not limited to any specific combination of hardware circuitry and software.

To provide for interaction with a user, embodiments of the subject matter described in this specification can be implemented on a computer having a display device, e.g., a CRT (cathode ray tube) or LCD (liquid crystal display) monitor, for displaying information to the user and a keyboard and a pointing device, e.g., a mouse or a trackball, by which the user can provide input to the computer. Other kinds of devices can be used to provide for interaction with a user as well; for example, feedback provided to the user can be any form of sensory feedback, e.g., visual feedback, auditory feedback, or tactile feedback; and input from the user can be received in any form, including acoustic, speech, or tactile input.

The MSP 204 uses the ticketing system 103 to manage and respond to information about the devices under management 209 and their end users 210. The ticketing system 103 uses a ticketing database 213 to store and update information relevant to the devices 209 and their end users 210, in the form of ticketing tickets. The ticketing tickets contain ticketing information about an issue or task that should be addressed by the MSP 204. An end user, exemplified in FIG. 2 by user 210n, can directly enter or modify a ticket into the ticketing database 213 by using a device, exemplified in FIG. 2 by 209n, to access a client ticket interface 214. The client ticket interface 214 accesses the ticketing system 103 to add or modify ticketing information in the ticketing database 213.

The ticketing interface 101 synchronizes relevant information between the device management database 207 and the ticketing database 213. In this way, information that is collected by the device management system 102 appears in the ticketing database 213, and information that is collected by the ticketing system 103 appears in the device management database 207. As an illustrative example, this can enable additional business support services 212 on the ticketing system 103. These business support services 212 can be accessed and utilized by the MSP 204 using a device 206 to access the ticketing system 103 through a user interface. A client-oriented version of the business support services 212 can be

accessed by an end user, exemplified in FIG. 2 by user 210n, using a device, exemplified in FIG. 2 by device 209n, through a client interface 211.

FIG. 3 illustrates a block diagram of an MSP 204 providing services to multiple clients 215. In some embodiments, an employee 205 or other agent or entity at an MSP 204 can use a device 206 connected to the device management system 102. The employee 205 can use the device management system 102 to provide monitoring or management functions to devices under management. Each client 215 has one or more devices under management 209. FIG. 3 illustrates this for client 215a with devices under management 209a-209k. Device 209a is exemplified as a desktop machine, device 209b is exemplified as a laptop machine, and device 209k is exemplified as a mobile device. Each device 209a-209k may be used by an end user 210a-210k that benefits directly from the monitoring and management functions. Each device 209a-209k connects to the device management system 102 through a network to retrieve and execute management functions and to report monitoring results. This structure is similar at all clients 215. The device management database 207 is used to keep track of the partitioning of devices by client, as will be shown in FIG. 4. The device management system 102 uses the device management database 207 to help the employee 205 visualize activities by clients, and facilitate management of the clients one at a time. The device management system 102 also allows the MSP 204 to consolidate actions and results from all clients 215 to make the servicing of multiple clients much more efficient. In addition, the device management system 102 is "multi-tenanted", which allows each of the clients 215 to access and use the device management system 102 without being aware of any of the other clients.

FIG. 4 illustrates a block diagram of the tables 401 and 402 in the device management database 207 that are used to keep track of the partitioning of devices by client. Each row of table 401 represents one client, and has one column 403 that references clients. Each row of table 402 represents a single device and has one column 404 that references the device, and one column 405 that reference the client where the device is located. Other table and row formats or data structure can be used to store, display or manipulate this information. As exemplified in FIG. 4, client 215a has a row 406 in table 401, and devices 209a-209k each have a row 407a-407k in table 402 that references the device in column 404 and references client 215a in column 405. A client can have multiple devices, as shown by the many-to-one relationship 408 between table 402 and table 401.

FIG. 5 illustrates a block diagram of the additional organization of devices into locations. A location represents a group of related devices within a client. In one embodiment, the organization of devices uses different clients to represent different companies, and uses locations to represent different offices within a single company. In some embodiments, an employee, agent or entity may indicate their location to the MSP. In some embodiments, the device can include a location device such as a Global Positioning System ("GPS") to obtain geographic information and communicate the geographic information to an MSP. In another embodiment, the location may be obtained via IP address lookup, Wi-Fi locating, cell tower triangulation, etc.

An employee 205 at an MSP 204 uses a device 206 connected through a network to the device management system 102. The employee 205 uses the device management system 102 to provide monitoring and management functions to devices under management 209. The clients 215 are each internally organized into one or more locations 501. In FIG. 5

this is exemplified by client **215a** being made up of locations **501a-501m**. Each location has one or more devices, as exemplified in FIG. 5 by location **501a** having devices **209a-209k**. The devices can comprise a mix of types, as exemplified by device **209a** as a desktop machine, device **209b** as a laptop machine, and device **209k** as a mobile device. Each device **209a-209k** may be used by an end user **210a-210k** that benefits directly from the monitoring and management functions. Each device **209a-209k** connects through a network to the device management system **102** to retrieve and execute management functions and to report monitoring results. In some embodiments, this structure is similar at all locations **501**, and the entire structure of locations and devices is similar at all clients **215**. The device management database **207** can keep track of the partitioning of devices by client and location, as will be shown in FIG. 6. The device management system **102** uses the device management database **207** to help the employee **205** visualize activities by client and location, and facilitate both the management of locations one at a time and the management of all locations of a single client. The device management system **102** allows the MSP **204** to consolidate actions and results from all locations **501a-501m** within a single client **215a**, to make servicing of large clients more efficient, and also allows the MSP **204** to consolidate actions and results from all clients **215**, to make servicing of multiple clients much more efficient. In addition, the device management system **102** is “multi-tenanted”, which allows each of the clients **215** to access and use the device management system **102** without being aware of any of the other clients.

FIG. 6 illustrates a block diagram of the tables **401**, **602**, and **603** in the device management database **207** that are used to keep track of the partitioning of devices by client and location. Each row of table **401** represents one client, and has one column **403** that references clients. Each row of table **602** represents a single location and has one column **605** that references the location, and one column **606** that references the client where the location is located. As exemplified in FIG. 6, client **215a** has a row **406** in table **401**, and locations **501a-501m** each have a row **612a-612m** in table **602** that references the location in column **605** and references client **215a** in column **606**. A client can have multiple locations, as shown by the many-to-one relationship **607** between table **602** and table **401**. Each row of table **603** represents a single device and has one column **608** that references the device, and one column **609** that references the location where the device is located. As exemplified in FIG. 6, devices **209a-209k** each have a row **613a-613k** in table **603** that references the device in column **608** and references location **501a** in column **609**. A location can have multiple devices, as shown by the many-to-one relationship **610** between table **603** and table **602**.

FIG. 7 illustrates a block diagram of the use of groups as a powerful and flexible method for organizing devices for management, and exemplifies several typical uses of these groups. An employee **205** at an MSP **204** uses a device **206** connected through a network to the device management system **102**. The MSP **204** uses the device management system **102** to provide management services to multiple clients **215**. The device management system **102** uses the device management database **207** to keep track of the structure and content of groups, as will be shown in FIG. 9. Each client has one or more locations, as exemplified by locations **501a-501j** for client **215a**, and locations **501k-501n** for client **215b**. Each location has one or more devices, as exemplified by devices **209a-209j** for location **501j**, and by devices **209k-209n** for location **501k**.

The employee **205** defines groups of devices that can encompass any arbitrary set of one or more devices. The

utility of these groups derives from the way in which they are defined. Once a group is defined, the employee **205** can apply management actions, or group reporting results, from all the devices in the group as a single unit. FIG. 7 illustrates several groups that exemplify some common useful definitions of groups. Note that these groups are not meant to be limiting, but are instead used to illustrate the concept and utility of groups. Group **701a** contains all of the devices in locations **501a** and **501b**. This group exemplifies a situation where locations represent departments in a single office, and the group is used to manage the entire office as a unit. Group **701b** contains the devices **209a** and **209b**. This group exemplifies a situation where devices in the group are all the devices at one office that are used for testing, so the update policy must be managed differently from most machines, in order not to disrupt the testing process. Group **701c** contains devices **209j** and **209k** from more than one location. This group exemplifies a situation in which the group defines all the devices that are Android smart phones, and the group is used to implement specific management tasks that need to be applied to all Android smart phones, regardless of where they are. Group **701d** contains all of the devices in clients **215b** and **215n**. This group exemplifies a situation in which the MSP **204** provides a higher class of service to clients that pay more for the service, and the group is used to manage the devices that are covered by that class of service.

Devices can be in more than one group. In FIG. 7, device **209k** is in both group **701c** and group **701d**. This can lead to potential ambiguities when certain management configurations are applied to group **701c**, and different conflicting management configurations are applied to group **701d**. In order to avoid this ambiguity, the device management system **102** follows specific rules about the order in which management configurations are applied to multiple groups, and how they override each other for devices that are in more than one group. In one embodiment, the device level configuration for group **701c** overrides the client level configuration for group **701d**. This is useful in a situation where group **701d** is used to apply updates twice a week, for a higher level of service, but group **701c** is used to apply security updates on server machines to once per day for all clients, since server machines are more vulnerable to external attacks.

FIG. 8 illustrates a block diagram of hierarchies of groups and how they are useful for management and reporting functions. A large multi-national company is shown, in which two locations **801** and **802** represent two offices in the city of Tampa. These locations are members of group **701e**, which represents the city of Tampa. Group **701e**, along with other locations **804-805** makes up the Eastern Region, which is represented by group **701f**. Continuing in this fashion, group **701f**, along with additional locations **807-808**, make up the United States, which is represented by group **701g**. Group **701g**, along with additional locations **810-811**, makes up the North American region, which is represented by group **701h**. Group **701h**, along with additional locations **813-814**, make up the entire company, which is represented as client **215**. In this way, the structure of the company is represented explicitly, and is available in a hierarchical display in the management system. This is of great use to the MSP in many ways, including management, reporting, and billing. Groups do not need to be hierarchical in this way, and in fact, hierarchical groups as shown in FIG. 8 can exist side by side with non-hierarchical groups as shown in FIG. 7.

FIG. 9 illustrates a block diagram of the tables **401**, **602**, **603**, **904**, and **905** in the device management database **207** that are used to keep track of the structure and content of groups. Each row of table **401** represents a single client, and

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has one column **403** that references clients. Each row of table **602** represents a single location and has one column **605** that references the location, and one column **606** that references the client where the location is located. As exemplified in FIG. 9, client **215a** has a row **406** in table **401**, and locations **501a-501j** each have a row **612a-612j** in table **602** that references the location in column **605** and references client **215a** in column **606**. A client can have multiple locations, as shown by the many-to-one relationship **607** between table **602** and table **401**. Each row of table **603** represents a single device and has one column **608** that references the device, and one column **609** that references the location where the device is located. As exemplified in FIG. 9, devices **209a-209j** each have a row **613a-613j** in table **603** that references the device in column **608** and references location **501j** in column **609**. A location can have multiple devices, as shown by the many-to-one relationship **610** between table **603** and table **602**.

Tables **904** and **905** represent the structure and content of the groups themselves. Each row of table **904** represents one group and has one column **913** that references the group, and one column **914** that references the parent group. For a group that is in a hierarchy, column **914** refers to the group one level up in the hierarchy. In one embodiment, the entry **923** for the Tampa group **701e** has a reference in column **914** that refers to the entry **925** for the Eastern Region group **701f**. For a group that is at the top level of the hierarchy, or not in any hierarchy, column **914** has a special “null” value **915** indicating that there is no parent group. Each row of table **905** represents the membership of a single device in a single group, and has one column **916** that references the device, and one column **917** that references the group. As exemplified in FIG. 9, device **209k** is in both group **701c** and **701d**, so one row **926** of table **905** references device **209k** in column **916** and group **701d** in column **917**, and another row **927** of table **905** references device **209k** in column **916** and group **701c** in column **917**. A single device can be in more than one group by appearing in column **916** of more than one row of table **905**, as shown by the many-to-one relationship **918** between table **905** and table **603**. A single group can contain more than one device by appearing in column **917** of more than one row of table **905**, as shown by the many-to-one relationship **919** between table **905** and table **904**.

FIG. 10 illustrates a block diagram of the use of a ticketing system **103** to automate and manage the workflow of the MSP **204**. The ticketing system **103** uses its ticketing database **213** to provide a help desk interface **1006**, an operations interface **1007**, a marketing/sales interface **1008**, an accounting interface **1009**, and a management interface **1010**. Note that FIG. 10 is meant to be illustrative, and not restrictive, so other embodiments of the ticketing system **103** provide other interfaces not shown in FIG. 10.

The help desk interface **1006** is used by employees **205a-205d** working at the help desk **1001** to provide on-demand assistance to clients. The ticketing system **103** is used to enter issues as they are received from clients and track them through their stages of research and resolution. The ticketing system **103** also facilitates the cooperation of multiple employees in the help desk **1001** in order to resolve an issue.

The operations interface **1007** is used by employees **205e-205h** working in operations **1002** to manage installations, modifications, and updates to the system hardware and system software of devices used by clients. The ticketing system **103** allows requests for these operations to originate from clients, internally, as the result of a resolution by the help desk **1001**, or as the result of a decision by the marketing/sales group **1003** or the management team **1005**.

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The marketing/sales interface **1008** is used by employees **205i-205m** in marketing/sales **1003** to assist in managing the sales process. The ticketing system **103** gives the marketing/sales staff **1003** more visibility into client requests, client needs, and sales opportunities.

The accounting interface **1009** is used by employees **205n-205q** in accounting **1004** to improve the accuracy and efficiency of the ordering, invoicing, and collection processes. Information about billable time used by the help desk **1001** and operations **1002** is obtained from the ticketing system **103**, as well as equipment that is installed by operations **1002**.

The management interface **1010** is used by company management **205r-205u** to get a good overall view of the operation of the company. The ticketing system **103** provides valuable information such as the call times and response times of the help desk **1001**, the accuracy of estimates by operations **1002**, and the effectiveness of generating and closing opportunities and leads by marketing/sales **1003**. The ticketing system **103** also provides some metrics on the effectiveness of individual employees **205**. Since the ticketing system **103** contains information about each business transaction of the company, it provides information about the financial status of the business. All of this information is extremely valuable to the management team **1005** in making informed decisions about running the MSP **204**.

FIG. 11 illustrates a block diagram showing how an end user **210** manually generates or updates a ticketing ticket in the ticketing system **103**. In one embodiment, this is the result of the end user **210** noticing a problem, indicating a need, checking the status of a current ticketing ticket, or asking a question. In this way, the ticketing system **103** provides a convenient way for the end user **210** to communicate with the MSP **204** in a way that is managed and tracked.

In FIG. 11a, the end user **210** uses a device **209** to access the client ticket interface **214** of the ticketing system **103**. The client ticket interface **214** is designed to provide friendly and easy-to-use access to clients. This allows the end user **210** to enter and update ticketing tickets simply.

In FIG. 11b, the end user **210** is using a device **209** that is running the agent software **1101** of the device management system **102**. The agent **1101** helps the end user **210** by starting the connection from the device **209** to a client management interface **208** on the device management system **102**. The end user **210** uses this client management interface **208**, in much the same way as the previously described client ticket interface **214** to the ticketing system **103**, to create or update a device management ticket. In addition, the agent **1101** accesses the system software **1102** and system hardware **1103** on the device **209** and provides detailed status and operational information about the device **209** to the device management system **102**. This additional information is associated with the device management ticket and can be extremely helpful to the MSP **204** in addressing the device management ticket. The ticketing interface **101** then uses the new device management information on the device management system **102** to create or update the appropriate ticketing ticket on the ticketing system **103**. The ticketing ticket is then processed in the same way as if it were directly entered by the end user **210** as described in conjunction with FIG. 11a.

FIG. 12 illustrates a block diagram of the way in which device management tickets can be automatically generated without any effort by an end user **210**. The device **209** is running an agent **1101** that uses the system software **1102** and system hardware **1103** to monitor the status of the device **209**. The agent **1101** can also update the device **209** without any effort by an end user **210**, in order to manage it effectively. The agent **1101** reports status information to the device man-

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agement system **102** where it is stored in the device management database **207**. If the device management system **102** determines that there is a condition on the device **209** that requires action by the MSP **204**, it uses the ticketing interface **101** to generate or update a ticketing ticket on the ticketing system **103**. This ticketing ticket is then received and managed in the same way as a ticketing ticket that is manually generated by an end user **210**, as previously described in conjunction with FIG. **11**.

There are many advantages to having the process illustrated by FIG. **12**. The device management tickets generated this way are accurate and not subject to the interpretation and error of the end user **210**. The device management tickets are complete, which is very valuable, since a end user **210** who is having a problem with the device **209** may be short of time and not willing to provide complete information. The device management tickets are timely since the process to generate them is quick and fully automated. The device management tickets are updated with additional information as the situation changes, since the agent **1101** continues to send status information to the device management system **102**. The device management tickets are generated even for a device **209** that is not attended by an end user **210**, as is common for a device **209** such as a server. All of these benefits conferred upon the device management tickets also apply to the ticketing tickets, because the ticketing interface **101** continues to update the ticketing system **103** with all of the device management information.

FIG. **13** illustrates a block diagram of ticket categories. FIG. **13a** shows the device management ticket table **1301** in the device management database **207** of the device management system **102**. The device management ticket table **1301** has a row **1305** for each ticket in the device management system. Each row **1305** has a column **1302** with an ID that uniquely identifies the device management ticket, a group of device management information columns **1303** with information about the device management ticket, and a ticket category column **1304** to store the ticket category **106**. The ticket category **106** for a ticket is typically an integer whose numeric value is associated with a list of different categories.

FIG. **13b** shows how the ticket category **106** is generated for a ticket. A mapping module **105** uses device management information **1307-1315** about the ticket to prioritize and determine what kind of ticket it is, and then selects a ticket category **106** for the device management ticket. The category system for tickets is very flexible and can be adapted to the needs of the MSP **204** because the parameters of the mapping module **105** are taken from the device management database **207**. The device management database **207** is supplied with a default set of parameters that work well for most businesses, and the MSP **204** can easily adjust and tune the parameters in the device management database **207** to match the actual operational needs of the business. In addition, when circumstances change over time and the mapping module **105** needs to be updated with new or different parameters, the device management database **207** can be easily updated.

The mapping module **105** has a great deal of available information to drive the generation of the ticket category **106** for the device management ticket. FIG. **13b** illustrates, in a way that is not meant to be limiting, a set of information **1307-1315** that is used by the mapping module **105** to determine the correct ticket category **106** for a device management ticket.

In one embodiment, a script is used to generate the ticket, and a command **1307** within the script itself sets the ticket category **106**. In another embodiment, the ticket is generated by an automated process such as a monitor that triggers based

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on certain device characteristics and events, and the ID **1308** of that automated process is associated with a ticket category **106**. In another embodiment, a specific category override **1309** is associated with a ticket during its creation to force a particular ticket category **106**.

Tickets can be created directly on the ticketing system **103** manually by an end user **210**, as discussed in conjunction with FIG. **11a**. Tickets can also be created on the device management system **102** manually by an end user **210**, as discussed in conjunction with FIG. **11b**. Tickets can also be created on the device management system **102** automatically by an agent **1101**, as discussed in conjunction with FIG. **12**. Tickets can also be created manually by an MSP employee **205**, either directly on the ticketing system **103** or on the device management system **102**. These various sources for ticket creation define the ticket source **1310**, which affects the ticket category **106** in one embodiment.

In one embodiment, the hardware platform **1311** to which the ticket refers affects the ticket category **106**. In another embodiment, the device ID **1312** of the device to which the ticket refers affects the ticket category **106**. In another embodiment, the client ID **1313** of the client **215** that owns the device to which the ticket refers affects the ticket category **106**. In another embodiment, the location ID **1314** of the location **501** of the device to which the ticket refers affects the ticket category **106**. In another embodiment, the group IDs **1315** of all the groups **701** containing the device to which the ticket refers affect the ticket category **106**.

This device management information **1307-1315** is taken from the device management ticket table **1301** of the device management database **207**, and serves as input to the mapping module **105** to generate the ticket category **106**. After the mapping module **105** generates the ticket category **106**, the ticket category column **1301** is updated in the device management ticket table **1301** of the device management database **207**.

FIG. **13c** shows how the ticket category **106** is used to update the ticketing system **103**. The ticket category **106** is retrieved from the device management ticket table **1301** of the device management database **207** by the ticketing interface **101**. The ticketing interface **101** uses an Application Programming Interface (API) **1316** to communicate with the ticketing system **103**. This API **613** is described in more detail later in conjunction with FIG. **14**. The API **1316** contains a ticket category data element **1317** for the ticket category which is passed along to the ticketing system **103**. The ticketing interface uses the value of the ticket category **106** for the ticket category **1317** in the API. The ticketing system **103** uses the ticket category **1317** to select a service board with a service board selection module **107**. This service board selection is updated in the ticketing database **213** of the ticketing system **103**.

Referring to FIG. **10**, the result of the service board selection module **107** that is stored in the ticketing database **213** is used by the interfaces **1006-1010** to prioritize and route the ticket. In one embodiment, a ticket for a server system can be given a higher priority than a ticket for a user device in the help desk interface **1006**, because the ticket is likely to affect more end users. In one embodiment, a ticket for a client who is evaluating the management software and has not yet purchased it may be routed to both the help desk interface **1006**, and to the sales manager **205i-205m** who is responsible for the client, through the sales/marketing interface **1008**. In one embodiment, a ticket indicating that a device needs a software update may be routed directly to the operations interface **1007** without going to the help desk interface **1006**, because the solution to the issue is known and can be implemented imme-

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diately. There are many other embodiments illustrating the effectiveness of ticket categories in improving the response time and reducing the expense of handling tickets.

FIG. 14 is a block diagram illustrating how the ticketing interface 101 uses a plug-in architecture to give it the flexibility to interface with many different kinds of ticketing systems 103a-103n. The MSP 204 may be using any one of a number of different ticketing systems 103a-103n. The decision to change the ticketing system 103 requires changes in training and infrastructure that affect many systems within the MSP 204, as well as changes that are visible to end users of the clients of the MSP 204. Because of this, an MSP 204 is not likely to change to a different ticketing system 103 without a very strong and compelling reason, so the provider of the device management system 102 achieves a significant business advantage by providing a ticketing interface 101 that can interface to many different ticketing systems 103a-103n.

This flexibility is achieved with the plug-in architecture of FIG. 14. An explicit dividing line between the ticketing interface 101 and the ticketing system 103 is defined as an Application Programming Interface (API) 1316. Most of the functionality of the ticketing interface 101 is hidden behind the API 1316, and any functionality that varies between the different ticketing systems 103a-103n is exposed in the API 1316 where it is implemented by the individual custom interfaces 1402 for each of the ticketing systems 103. Careful definition of the API 1316 minimizes the amount of implementation that must be done in a custom interface 1402. The ticketing interface 101 can select the ticketing system 103 to which it interfaces by selecting the appropriate custom interface 1402 from the program storage 1401 of the device management system 102, loading that custom interface 1402, and accessing it to communicate to the ticketing system 103. The ticketing system 103 communicates with the custom interface 1402 when it needs to access or update information from the device management system 102, and the custom interface 1402 uses the API 1316 to communicate with the ticketing interface 101, which in turn uses the device management system 102 and its device management database 207 to satisfy the request.

The plug-in architecture of FIG. 14 is very flexible. It allows the device management system 102 to interface with multiple ticketing systems 103a-103n at the same time. It also allows the custom interfaces 1402 to be updated without changing or restarting the device management system 102. These updates can happen as a result of changes to the ticketing systems 103. Since the ticketing systems 103 are often provided by a different company than the device management system 102, it is important to be able to adapt to changes in them without disruption. The plug-in architecture also simplifies the addition of support for a new ticketing system 103, which has been previously described as a significant business advantage for the provider of the software for the device management system 102.

FIG. 15 is a block diagram illustrating one embodiment of a synchronization issue that arises between the device management system 102 and the ticketing system 103. This is one embodiment of an issue that the ticketing interface 101 must handle. As previously described, the device management ticket table 1301 of the device management database 207 on the device management system 102 contains an ID column 1302 that uniquely identifies each device management ticket 1305. Similarly, the ticketing system 103 has a ticketing ticket table 1501 in its ticketing database 213, which contains a row 1504 for each ticketing ticket in the system. The ticketing ticket table 1501 has an ID column 1502 that uniquely iden-

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tifies each ticketing ticket, and has a group of ticketing information columns 1503 with additional information about the ticketing ticket.

The ticketing interface 101 must keep track of the association between the device management tickets 1305 in its device management ticket table 1301 and the ticketing tickets 1504 in the ticketing ticket table 1501. It uses a ticket mapping table 1505 in its device management database 207 in order to do this. The ticket mapping table 1505 has a row 1506 for each association between a device management ticket 1305 in the device management ticket table 1301 and a ticketing ticket 1504 in the ticketing ticket table 1501. The ticket mapping table 1505 has a column 1507 with the ID 1302 of the row 1305 from the device management ticket table 1301, and has a column 1508 with the ID 1502 of the corresponding row 1504 from the ticketing ticket table 1501. In this way, the ticket mapping table 1505 can be used to look up the ID 1502 of a ticketing ticket in the ticketing ticket table 1501, given the ID 1302 of a device management ticket in the device management ticket table 1301. It can also be used to look up the ID 1302 of a device management ticket in the device management ticket table 1301, given the ID 1502 of a ticketing ticket in the ticketing ticket table 1501. This provides the ticketing interface 101a way to update ticket information in either direction between the two systems.

However, in one embodiment, the ticketing system 103 allows the ID 1502 to be changed. In one embodiment, the ID 1502 is visible to an end user and has an edit function. In another embodiment, the ticketing system 103 has a table optimization function that reorders the ticketing ticket table 1501 and changes one or more of the values of the ID 1502 as a result. Once this happens, the data in the ticket mapping table 1505 becomes invalid. As exemplified in FIG. 15, row 1506n of the ticket mapping table 1505 maps the value In from row 1305n of the device management ticket table 1301 to the value Tn from row 1504n of the ticketing ticket table 1501. In one embodiment, the ticketing system 103 updates row 1504n and changes the value of Tn. As a result, the value of Tn in the ID column 1502 of row 1504n no longer matches the value of Tn in column 1508 of row 1506n of the ticket mapping table 1505. This prevents the ticketing interface 101 from being able to update information about the ticket in rows 1305n and 1504n in either direction.

This is a significant problem, because it can be caused by an end user 210 but it impacts the business of the MSP 204. In one embodiment, an end user 210 updates the ID 1502 of an active ticketing ticket on Friday afternoon, and the MSP 204 loses all the revenue derived from addressing the ticket over the weekend, until a employee 205 at the MSP 204 notices the failure of the ticketing interface 101, and fixes the problem to restore the tracking of the ticket in both the device management system 102 and the ticketing system 103.

FIG. 16 is a block diagram illustrating how the synchronization problem described in conjunction with FIG. 15 is overcome. The ticketing interface 101 includes a sanity checker 1601 that is responsible for detecting and resolving synchronization issues. The sanity checker 1601 runs at a periodic interval and can also be invoked on demand if a problem is noticed. The sanity checker 1601 uses the ticketing interface 101 to communicate with the device management system 102 and the ticketing system 103. It can also access and update the device management database 207 directly. The sanity checker 1601 has a detection module 108 that detects when ticketing data does not correctly match in the device management database 207 and the ticketing database 213. When a mismatch is found, the sanity checker 1601 invokes the resolution module 109 with information about the mis-

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match. The resolution module 109 attempts to resolve the issue, and can be configured to create a ticket on the ticketing system 103 with information about its success or failure in the attempt.

The resolution module 109 has a number of different strategies for correcting the issue. In one embodiment, the resolution module 109 discovers the correlation between mismatched data by elimination 1604, where it removes matching data from consideration and matches what is left over. In another embodiment, the resolution module 109 uses matching between data columns of existing rows to find a best fit 1605, and synthesizes information for the unmatched columns. In another embodiment, the resolution module 109 accesses a history 1606 of changes to the database, determines what changes affected the matching, and corrects those changes. These are meant to be illustrative examples of the techniques and not to limit the scope of the resolution module 109.

The flexibility of the sanity checker 1601 is further enhanced by implementing the detection module 108 and resolution module 109 using parameters that are stored in the device management database 207. If a new synchronization issue arises that must be resolved manually, the detection and resolution of the issue can be added to the parameters in the device management database 207, and from then on the issue will be detected and resolved automatically by the sanity checker 1601. In this way, the sanity checker 1601 adds significant value and resilience to the ticketing interface 101.

FIG. 17 is a block diagram illustrating the design and use of asset templates. An asset template 1705 is used to initialize tickets with information 1708 that can vary based on device management information. Each asset template 1705 is stored in a template table 1701 of the device management database 207 of the device management system 102. During the initial device setup 1703, the device management system 102 selects an asset template 1705 from the template table 1701 based on the device being setup and the client information about the device, and uses the template information 1706 to initialize some of the information in the device table 1702 of the device management database 207. Later, during the ticket creation process 1704 on the device management system 102, device information 1707 from the device table 1702 is used to add ticket information 1708 to the device management ticket table 1301. This ticket information 1708 serves as input to the mapping module 105 that generates the ticket category 106 as previously described in conjunction with FIG. 13. In this way, the information in the asset template 1705 controls the ticket category 106, which in turn controls the routing and prioritization of the ticket in the ticketing system 103.

Asset templates have many important business uses. In one embodiment, the MSP 204 provides multiple service levels by which clients 215 pay more money for a faster response time. This can be implemented by using an asset template 1705 for each service level. These templates are associated with the clients when they purchase the corresponding service level. When a device generates a ticket, the asset template 1705 associated with the client owning that device is used, and the resulting ticket contains ticket information 1708 allowing the mapping module 105 to select the appropriate ticket category 106 for the ticket. That category gives the ticket the appropriate priority in the help desk interface 1006 based on the client's service level. At the same time, the ticket category 106 also gives the ticket the appropriate billing rate in the accounting interface 1009 (higher cost for higher priority). In another embodiment, the MSP 204 decides that servers at all clients should be treated with higher priority, and billed at a higher rate, than end user devices. The device

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management system 102 automatically determines that the device is a server during the initial device setup 1703, and selects a different asset template 1705 based on that information. In this way, the same result (higher priority at higher cost) is achieved, but for a different reason.

FIG. 18 is a block diagram illustrating the design and use of time records. FIG. 18a shows the device management ticket table 1301 previously described in conjunction with FIG. 13. The device management ticket table 1301 has a row 1305 for each device management ticket. Each row 1305 has an ID column 1302 that uniquely identifies the device management ticket, and a group of device management information columns 1303 containing information about the device management ticket. In addition, the device management ticket table 1301 has an automation time column 1801. This column contains information about the amount of human time that was saved by the device management system 102 in automating the detection and resolution involved with the device management ticket.

FIG. 18b shows the process for generating, maintaining, and using the automation time information 1801. The device management system 102 runs a script 1802 that communicates with the agent 1101, which in turn uses the system software 1102 and system hardware 1103 to implement the actions of the script 1802. The result is that the script 1802 automates the detection and resolution of an issue that would normally require human intervention. The script 1802 has a mechanism for estimating the amount of human time that would have been required for detecting and resolving the issue, and it updates the automation time column 1801 of the device management ticket table 1301 in the device management database 207 with this information. The ticketing interface 101 then updates the ticketing system 103 with this information.

The information about automation time is extremely useful to the MSP 204 in many ways. In one embodiment, marketing/sales 1003 uses the information about automation time as hard data for potential clients about how the device management system 102 and ticketing system 103 can save them money, and also as evidence for existing clients on how it is already saving them money. In another embodiment, accounting 1004 uses the information about automation time to accurately bill clients for services at a lower rate for automation. In another embodiment, management 1005 keeps track of how efficiently the company is using its automated tools and can understand the return on investment that they provide, as well as getting key information about how that return can be improved.

FIG. 19 illustrates an embodiment of a user interface, provided by the ticketing interface 101, that shows an overview of the overall system described in conjunction with FIG. 2. The Server Connection display selected by 1901 shows information about the connection between the device management system 102 and the ticketing system 103. The Company Sync display selected by 1903 shows information about the synchronization between the device management database 207 and the ticketing database 213 of data about the companies of the clients 215. The Contact Sync display selected by 1904 shows information about the synchronization between the device management database 207 and the ticketing database 213 of data about the contact information for the clients 215. The Ticket Sync display selected by 1905 shows information about the synchronization between the device management database 207 and the ticketing database 213 of ticketing data. The Asset Sync display selected by 1906 shows information about the synchronization between the device management database 207 and the ticketing database 213 of data about the

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devices under management **209**. The Agreement Mapping display selected by **1907** shows information about contractual agreements between the MSP **204** and the clients **215**. The Service Boards display selected by **1908** shows information about the way in which tickets on the device management system **102** are mapped to service boards on the ticketing system **103**. The Ticket Status display selected by **1909** shows detailed information about the tickets on both the device management system **102** and the ticketing system **103**. The Ticket Priority display selected by **1910** shows information about the way in which tickets on the device management system **102** are prioritized on the ticketing system **103**. The Ticket Category display selected by **1911** shows information about the way in which tickets on the device management system **102** are mapped to ticket categories **106**. The Streamlining display selected by **1912** shows information about the way in which tickets on the device management system **102** are mapped to ticket categories **106** in a special way based solely on one piece of the mapping information **1307-1315**. Displays selected by entries in the Miscellaneous area **1913** show a variety of information about the overall system, including messages, charts of data usage, sanity checks, and sales opportunities.

The Server Connection display selected by **1901** includes the network address **1902** of the ticketing system **103**, and allows editing that address to use a different ticketing system server. It includes a Statistics display **1914** showing a summary of actions taken by the ticketing interface **101**. It also includes a Properties display **1915** that allows editing of parameters that control the ticketing interface **101**.

FIG. **20** illustrates an embodiment of a user interface, provided by the ticketing interface **101**, that shows the Service Boards display selected by **1908**. The service board associated with a ticket is used to route the ticket to the correct employees **205** through the appropriate interface **1006-1010**, as previously described in conjunction with FIG. **10**. The display contains a list **2002** of the service boards and an indication **2004** of whether they were imported from the ticketing system **103** or created on the device management system **102**. It has a button **2005** that initiates importing any new service boards from the ticketing system **103**. It has an interface **2006** that allows the configuration of the default service board for tickets for which the service board is not otherwise specified. This can be configured separately for tickets **2007** that are created manually through the client management interface **208** as shown in FIG. **11b**, tickets **2008** that are created manually through the agent **1101** as shown in FIG. **11b**, and tickets **2009** that are created automatically by the agent **1101** as shown in FIG. **12**.

FIG. **21** illustrates an embodiment of a user interface, provided by the ticketing interface **101**, that shows the Ticket Category display selected by **1911**. The category associated with a ticket is used by the service board selection module **107** to select the correct service board, as previously described in conjunction with FIG. **13**. The display contains a list of ticket categories with the name **2101**, description **2102**, service board selection **2103**, priority **2104**, service type **2105**, sub type **2106**, and item **2107** associated with each ticket category. The name **2101** is used to display the ticket category. The description **2102** is used to provide a summary of the function of the ticket category. The service board selection **2103** for a ticket is used to route the ticket to the correct employees **205** through the appropriate interface **1006-1010**, as previously described in conjunction with FIG. **10**. The priority **2104**, service type **2105**, sub type **2106**, and item **2107** associated with a ticket are used to provide more fine-

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grained control over the display of tickets to employees **205** in the appropriate interface **1006-1010**.

Any of the fields **2101-2107** can be edited for any category by selecting the field and changing it. When the editing operations are done, clicking on the Save button **2108** saves the changes.

FIG. **22** illustrates an embodiment of a user interface, provided by the ticketing interface **101**, that shows the Ticket Priority display selected by **1910**. The priority associated with a ticket is used to provide more control over the display of tickets to employees **205** in the appropriate interface **1006-1010**, as previously described in conjunction with FIG. **10**. The display contains a list of ticket priorities with the name **2201** of the priority on the device management system **102**, and the name **2202** of the priority on the ticketing system **103**.

Any of the fields **2201-2202** can be edited for any priority by selecting the field and changing it. When the editing operations are done, clicking on the Save button **2203** saves the changes.

FIG. **23** illustrates an embodiment of a user interface, provided by the ticketing interface **101**, that shows the Streamlining display selected by **1912**. Streamlining provides a simplified way to control the service board selection module **107** based on a very simple selection rule that uses a small amount of information **1307-1315** about the ticket. The service board associated with a ticketing ticket is used to provide control over the display of ticketing tickets to employees **205** in the appropriate interface **1006-1010**, as previously described in conjunction with FIG. **10**. The Streamline Clients part of the display **2305** contains a list of clients, which usually represent different clients **215**, with the name **2301**, the service board **2302** to which tickets from that client are sent, and the ticket type **2303** that is assigned to tickets from that client. A similar configuration **2306** is available for assigning service boards based on collections, which are lists of groups **701** as previously described in conjunction with FIG. **7**. A similar configuration **2307** is available for assigning service boards based on locations **501**.

Any of the fields **2301-2303** in any of the configuration screens **2305-2307** can be edited by selecting the field and changing it. When the editing operations are done, clicking on the Save button **2304** saves the changes.

FIG. **24** illustrates an embodiment of a user interface, provided by a plug-in custom interface **1402**, to install and configure the custom interface. The user interface uses a graphical element **2401** to identify the type of device management system **102** and a graphical element **2402** to identify the type of ticketing system **103** that it is designed to interface. The installation and configuration is managed using a step-by-step wizard that introduces the product **2403**, configures general settings **2404**, configures service boards **2405**, configures ticket service status **2406**, configures ticket service priority **2407**, and completes the installation and setup **2408**.

FIG. **25** illustrates an embodiment of a user interface, provided by the ticketing interface **101**, that provides control and shows information about the sanity checker **1601** described in conjunction with FIG. **16**. FIG. **25a** show the main sanity check display that is selected by the System Check item **2501**. It displays a line for each message from a sanity check that was run, showing the section **2505**, the message **2506**, the remediation **2507**, the suggestion **2508**, and the severity **2509** associated with the sanity check. The messages are organized into informational **2502**, warning **2503**, and error **2504** messages. The section **2505** provides a convenient way to organize and sort the messages. The message text **2506** is a readable form of the message. The remediation **2507** describes any action that was taken by the system in conjunction with

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the message. The suggestion **2508** provides advice to an end user on actions that might be taken as a result of the message. The severity **2509** gives a numerical classification on how serious the error is. As described in conjunction with FIG. 16, the sanity checks are run periodically, but they can be initiated manually by clicking on the Run System Check button **2510**.

FIG. 25b shows an embodiment of a user interface to configure the sanity checks. The Sanity Check Frequency control **2511** adjusts how often the sanity checks are run. The Sanity Checks area **2512** selects which sanity checks are run. The Enable Auto Remediate control **2513** turns on and off the feature for the system to take action to fix errors that are discovered by the sanity checks. When the end user is finished with configuration, clicking on the Save button **2514** applies the configuration changes.

FIG. 26 illustrates an embodiment of a user interface, provided by the ticketing interface **101**, that provides control and shows information about asset templates **1705** as described in conjunction with FIG. 17. The header **2601** shows the name of the individual asset template **1705** that is displayed. Each line shows the mapping from a product **2602** in the device management system **102** to a product **2603** in the ticketing system **103**, and the agreement type **2604** that is associated with that product. New asset templates can be created by using the New Template button **2605**. Existing asset templates can be modified by using the Edit Template button **2606**. Existing asset templates can be removed by using the Delete Template button **2607**.

FIG. 27 illustrates a flowchart of an embodiment of the steps taken to synchronize a device management system with a ticketing system. The process begins with step **2701**. Step **2702** retrieves the device management information from the device management system. Step **2703** updates the ticketing information on the ticketing system to match. Step **2704** selects a ticket category based on the device management information, and step **2705** selects a service board for the ticket. Step **2706** retrieves the ticketing information from the ticketing system, and then step **2707** tests for the consistency of the device management information retrieved in step **2702** and the ticketing information retrieved in step **2706**. If the information is consistent, then step **2708** proceeds to step **2710** to finish the process. If not, step **2708** proceeds to step **2709**, which resolves any inconsistencies in the information, and then proceeds to step **2710** to finish the process.

There are many practical and operational refinements to the systems and methods of the present disclosure that arise in actual use. These refinements can give rise to additional embodiments that are apparent to one skilled in the art, but have not been described in the detailed embodiments above. Some of these refinements are listed here as examples. This is not a comprehensive list but is intended to demonstrate additional aspects of the power and flexibility of the invention:

In one example, the management server can use information from the agent about devices under management to automatically assign roles to devices in the ticketing system server. In another example, the management server can use information from the agent about the timing and nature of actions taken on devices under management, both automated and manual, along with the roles assigned to the devices, to adjust pricing on those actions in the ticketing system server.

Embodiments of the subject matter and the operations described in this specification can be implemented in digital electronic circuitry, or in computer software, firmware, or hardware, including the structures disclosed in this specification and their structural equivalents, or in combinations of one or more of them. The subject matter described in this specification can be implemented as one or more computer pro-

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grams, i.e., one or more circuits of computer program instructions, encoded on one or more computer storage media for execution by, or to control the operation of, data processing apparatus. Alternatively or in addition, the program instructions can be encoded on an artificially generated propagated signal, e.g., a machine-generated electrical, optical, or electromagnetic signal that is generated to encode information for transmission to suitable receiver apparatus for execution by a data processing apparatus. A computer storage medium can be, or be included in, a computer-readable storage device, a computer-readable storage substrate, a random or serial access memory array or device, or a combination of one or more of them. Moreover, while a computer storage medium is not a propagated signal, a computer storage medium can be a source or destination of computer program instructions encoded in an artificially generated propagated signal. The computer storage medium can also be, or be included in, one or more separate components or media (e.g., multiple CDs, disks, or other storage devices).

It should be understood that the systems described above may provide multiple ones of any or each of those components and these components may be provided on either a standalone machine or, in some embodiments, on multiple machines in a distributed system. The systems and methods described above may be implemented as a method, apparatus or article of manufacture using programming and/or engineering techniques to produce software, firmware, hardware, or any combination thereof. In addition, the systems and methods described above may be provided as one or more computer-readable programs embodied on or in one or more articles of manufacture. The term “article of manufacture” as used herein is intended to encompass code or logic accessible from and embedded in one or more computer-readable devices, firmware, programmable logic, memory devices (e.g., EEPROMs, ROMs, PROMs, RAMs, SRAMs, etc.), hardware (e.g., integrated circuit chip, Field Programmable Gate Array (FPGA), Application Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC), etc.), electronic devices, a computer readable non-volatile storage unit (e.g., CD-ROM, floppy disk, hard disk drive, etc.). The article of manufacture may be accessible from a file server providing access to the computer-readable programs via a network transmission line, wireless transmission media, signals propagating through space, radio waves, infrared signals, etc. The article of manufacture may be a flash memory card or a magnetic tape. The article of manufacture includes hardware logic as well as software or programmable code embedded in a computer readable medium that is executed by a processor. In general, the computer-readable programs may be implemented in any programming language, such as LISP, PERL, C, C++, C#, PROLOG, or in any byte code language such as JAVA. The software programs may be stored on or in one or more articles of manufacture as object code.

Similarly, while operations are depicted in the drawings in a particular order, this should not be understood as requiring that such operations be performed in the particular order shown or in sequential order, or that all illustrated operations be performed, to achieve desirable results. In certain circumstances, multitasking and parallel processing may be advantageous. Moreover, the separation of various system components in the embodiments described above should not be understood as requiring such separation in all embodiments, and it should be understood that the described program components and systems can generally be integrated in a single software product or packaged into multiple software products.

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References to “or” may be construed as inclusive so that any terms described using “or” may indicate any of a single, more than one, and all of the described terms.

Thus, particular embodiments of the subject matter have been described. Other embodiments are within the scope of the following claims. In some cases, the actions recited in the claims can be performed in a different order and still achieve desirable results. In addition, the processes depicted in the accompanying figures do not necessarily require the particular order shown, or sequential order, to achieve desirable results. In certain embodiments, multitasking and parallel processing may be advantageous.

While this specification contains many specific implementation details, these should not be construed as limitations on the scope of any inventions or of what may be claimed, but rather as descriptions of features specific to particular implementations of particular inventions. Certain features described in this specification in the context of separate embodiments can also be implemented in combination in a single embodiment. Conversely, various features described in the context of a single embodiment can also be implemented in multiple embodiments separately or in any suitable subcombination. Moreover, although features may be described above as acting in certain combinations and even initially claimed as such, one or more features from a claimed combination can in some cases be excised from the combination, and the claimed combination may be directed to a subcombination or variation of a subcombination.

What is claimed:

1. A system for synchronizing data between a device management system and a ticketing system, the system comprising:

a server including a processor;  
a ticketing interface of the server that receives, from the ticketing system, ticketing information associated with a ticketing ticket, and receives, from the device management system, device management information associated with a device management ticket;  
an update module executing on the server that compares the ticketing information with the device management information, and updates, responsive to the comparison, the ticketing information to correspond to the device management information;  
a mapping module executing on the server that identifies, based on the device management information, a ticket category of the device management ticket;  
a service board selection module executing on the server that selects, responsive to the identified ticket category, a service board for the ticketing ticket; and  
the update module further updates the device management information on the device management ticket on the device management system to correspond to the ticketing information about the ticketing ticket on the ticketing system,  
wherein the update module generates an updated device management ticket on the device management system that includes the device management information updated by the update module.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein the ticketing system selects, dependent on the service board, one or more user interfaces for presentation of the ticketing ticket.

3. The system of claim 1, wherein the device management system selects the update module from a collection comprising

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ing a plurality of update modules configured to interface with one or more different types of ticketing systems.

4. The system of claim 1, wherein the device management information includes time record information equal to an estimated amount of time for resolving the device management ticket.

5. The system of claim 4, wherein the update module updates the ticketing ticket with the time record information.

6. The system of claim 1, wherein one or more items of the device management information is initialized from a template, the template selected based on a device referenced by the device management ticket.

7. A method for synchronizing data between a device management system and a ticketing system via a ticketing interface, comprising:

receiving, by an update module executing on at least one processor of a server communicatively coupled to the device management system and the ticketing system, ticket information associated with a ticketing ticket from the ticketing system;

receiving, by the update module from the device management system, device management information associated with a device management ticket;

comparing, by the update module, the ticketing information with the device management information;

updating, by the update module responsive to the comparison, the ticketing information to correspond to the device management information;

identifying, by a mapping module executing on the server, a ticket category of the device management ticket based on the device management information;

selecting, by a service board selection module executing on the server, a service board for the ticketing ticket responsive to the identified ticket category; and

updating the device management information on the device management ticket on the device management system to match the ticketing information about the ticketing ticket on the ticketing system; and

generating an updated device management ticket on the device management system with updated device management information.

8. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

selecting, by the ticketing system, dependent on the service board, one or more user interfaces for presentation of the ticketing ticket.

9. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

selecting, by the device management system, a procedure for the updating from a collection of stored procedures configured to interface with one or more different types of ticketing systems.

10. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

recording, in the device management information, time record information equal to an estimated amount of time to resolve the device management ticket.

11. The method of claim 10, further comprising:

updating the ticketing ticket with the time record information.

12. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

initializing one or more items of the device management information from a template, the template selected based on a device referenced by the device management ticket.

\* \* \* \* \*